THE GIANT OF OLDBORNE

BY JOHN OWEN

BILLIE CHAPMAN

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By a cruel jest of nature, the hero of this unusual story was endowed, not only with a body of enormous size, but with a nature of corresponding sensitiveness and affection. After unsuccessful attempts at farming, he joined a traveling circus, where he appeared among the freaks, in order that he might earn something for his mother's support, meanwhile finding in religion a consolation for his earthly sufferings.

The Giant had previously fallen in love with a pretty but heartless girl, who encouraged him for a lark and then married a worthless fellow. When the death of his mother left him free, he found that his old love was also free but realized that to support her and her child he must resume the hated life of the circus.

'The Giant' is one of the most distinguished of recent novels, a delicate psychological study exquisitely written and filled with vivid pictures of English village life of the last century.

THE GIANT OF OLDBORNE

BY JOHN OWEN

O. P. Sent to P. R. L. 9/20/32

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BY

JOHN OWEN

AUTHOR OF

"THE COTTON BROKER," "ROBERT GREGORY," ETC.

BOSTON · AND · NEW YORK

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TO MY FRIEND

W. H. HELM

My dear Helm,

You will remember our discovery of the grave of a certain Suffolk giant, who died seventy years ago, and whose tombstone bore the inscription

"IN LOVING MEMORY

OF

. . . . . THE SUFFOLK GIANT,

WHO DIED . . . . . .

HE WAS EXHIBITED IN MOST PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, BUT HE MAKES HIS BEST EXHIBITION IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS BLESSED REDEEMER."

My giant is, of course, another and an invented character, while the facts of the story are also purely imaginary.

Beyond the use of a few Suffolk idioms, I have made no attempt to reproduce the local speech.

John Owen.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

I

ONE day in June, these many years ago, Daniel Windmill, the youthful giant of Oldborne, stood at the street corner.

Oldborne village lies partly upon a slope. At the foot of the hill the street bends away, so that a person at the higher end can see only the houses on one side. The shops were mostly clustered together in, as it were, the well of the little thoroughfare. There were the butcher, the rival grocers, and the other tradesmen—including the baker, who had to meet competition from the well-known travelling woman-baker from Orlham, who baked her own bread and then sold it from door to door. The upper part of the street carried houses only on one side—shops first and then black-thatched and red-brick cottages with a space, here and there, for a garden with leggy hollyhocks that reminded the giant of himself: on the other side, near the top of the slope, stood the ancient church with its brasses of the sixteenth century and its register, wherein was to be found the imperishable name, written there at his baptism, of Thomas Cavendish the navigator. Behind the church and between it and the last shop, a cobbler's, was the approach to Laughter's farm. Here a young and ambitious Laughter had lately set up a dairy, not merely to satisfy the needs of Oldborne, but in the hope of attracting the attention of the many passing travellers on their way for a holiday at Stowe who would be ready to spend their money.

It was at the bend in the street, so that he commanded

both ends, that Daniel Windmill stood. There was a halt in the slow-moving village life that went with the hot and windless afternoon of midsummer. Overhead hung a sky mysteriously pale, with a general and unvarying brightness into which it was impossible for eye to look. The giant knew because he had tried to look, being then very nearly deprived of his sight. This greatly-shining brightness must be the veil of God, behind which whatsoever was pleasing to the Holy Will could be performed without the observation from any who here in the village might have lifted a curious eye.

But the giant stood there at the moment with little thought of Heavenly activities, though upon these he was wont often to speculate. It was only now that he dare set himself in this street so heavy with warmth : the boys were indoors at dinner. For an hour they left the hot white village to him. As soon as it was time for them to come out he could slip away. He must always slip away when the boys came. Because the boys looked at him, cruelly, beginning slowly at his huge feet, then eyeing his stalky shanks, and finishing up, with a pretence of having been made weary with the effort, at his head. When their eyes did at last reach his head they asked him if it was cold up there, or whether he was Snowdon or Nevis. That last kind of jocularity came only from the cleverer boys who were at the National school. But then it was these cleverer boys who could hurt the most.

For, absurd as it probably was, these things hurt. He had not much power to analyse, and did not know that the real effectiveness of their words lay in the fact that they separated him from his kind, set him apart, distinguished him ; and only then ridiculed.

He was different. He stood there in his black, patched homespun out of which neck, wrist and ankles seemed to sprout like plants in pots too small for them. His clothes were always too small. When, as rarely she was able to do, his mother bought him a new coat, he grew out of it at once. His great feet were crammed into the big, patched boots, and stood out absurdly. One somehow inspected those

boots before looking more closely at the moonlike, pale, freckled face, with its strangely tender eyes and sensitive mouth. A rather fine brow contrasted with a small jaw and chin. The general air was one of ineffectiveness.

He was perfectly aware that he was ineffective. At twenty he should have been a strong man, and boys did not call out with impunity at strong men. His long figure wasn't even a futile display of strength : it was not imposing : it did not do as much as suggest a force that was not there. No, it was palpably a demonstration of weakness, and called attention to itself. It said as plainly as if it spoke the words :

" I have outgrown my strength. But I have not finished doing so. I am still growing—still using my small reserve. What ought to go into my muscles is being used to increase the distance between my crown and my feet, so that, so far from declaring my increasing strength, my increasing height declares my increasing weakness. I was weak when I was six feet : I am weaker still now that I am six foot eight. If ever I should have the misfortune to reach seven feet, then surely I must be finally undone, a bent weed, a thing very rightly accursed."

He had once thought that it would be pleasant to be observed, and that as he grew older he would discover in the violet eyes of shy girls, respect and perhaps admiration. He could remember how they had turned to follow with their glances the great figure of some soldier from the Fort, magnificent in his regimental uniform, six foot or more, and yet, by inches, not as tall as the envious and stringy giant who watched him go.

But the girls had never had any eyes for Daniel, or never shy eyes—only eyes that looked boldly ; as one girl nudged another or whispered loudly in the ear of some squat beau : " There's long-legged Dan, ask him ' Bain't you froz up there ? ' " And the squat beau, being ready to achieve something so cheaply, would come up, pushing against the weak legs of his victim, so that he staggered, and ask him the impudent question. For it *was* impudent. Very well did Daniel know that. But it was not to be avenged. He knew that these firmly planted five-footers, with their

muscles hardened by daily toil at the bench, or on the farm, had everything in their favour. Daniel did not think he was afraid of them, but they had only to push against his infirmly-planted person to knock him over; and then he looked a bigger—literally a bigger fool than before.

And to return to the matter of these girls. He could talk to them as well as any one of those other young men if only they would give him the chance. In fact he had ideas—ideas about beauty and about birds and the behaviour of tiny fish in the wimpling stream there high up above the bridge. These fellows hadn't any lively ideas except scududery, and that they kept for their own sex. Ordinarily their talk to girls consisted of "I saw Polly Dickenson out with Bob last night; they never seed me though." The girl listener giggled and the hero talked further. "He wor a-holdin' her hand, and after that he began a-askin' her how many fellers had kissed her, same as if I were a-askin' you. And then he kiss her loike this."

"No, you don't," says the girl. "Why—there be that big silly bor Daniel Windmill listenin'!"

"Poof!—What odds that *he* hear? Though I don't suppose he can hear much from the top of that liddle ole mountain."

The last was added if the young man was clever enough to think of something of the sort. More often his conclusion took the form of approaching with an air of violence. "If that thing have been a-listenin' to me——"

This air of violence was often assumed by persons who would never show it towards other young men—a fact which, being recognised by Daniel, completed his conviction of his own weakness.

He knew himself different, separated, a laughing-stock. Life grew to be a burden so hideous that he prayed to escape it. But escape was not offered nor permitted.

This matter had always occupied him, troubled him; for from so early a period had he been made aware of the essential absurdity of his person, of his lath-like figure. "Well, how you do run up a' legs!" or "Length without breadth—skin without sense," was what they used to say,

and, as some hideously lively sense of the present reminded him, it was what they still said. He was the accepted jest of the village. Boys of half his age cheeked him to his face and relied on their firmness on their feet to " topple " him over. That was their own phrase for the operation, and it was the true, the adequate phrase. He knew that they had only to come up against him to accomplish his ignominious fall. But there came a day when the thing grew so intolerable that he must speak to somebody. He had never told his mother and would not now. He hoped, believed, and prayed that she remained ignorant of the misery of which he must taste as his daily food. She troubled enough, as he knew, to make the bread that fed them physically. She must not have a petty burden added to those other heavier ones.

II

Yet where was relief? He remembered that once, years ago, he thought he had found it. Curiously enough the occasion had been one Sunday when he had heard the lesson read. Daniel suddenly had an idea.

Looking back over that adventure, now six years distant, Daniel wondered vaguely how he had ever raked together the courage to face it. For it demanded courage, tremendous courage, since it involved not only addressing, but challenging the Vicar. For days he had pondered how to contrive it. Thrice he had urged himself to speak, but without finding the courage for the words. But his mother being sometimes employed to fashion servants' uniforms for the Vicarage, he was sent one morning to deliver a parcel at the house. Outgrowing his strength as he was doing, he was forced at intervals to surrender the jobs the farmers gave him; and he was then at the disposal of his mother as a messenger. Having relieved himself of his burden, he was retreating in good order, when a figure, walking in the sunshine on a lawn of green velvet near the path, made him start. Ordinarily he would have wished to hasten on. Even now he instinctively quickened his step. For he had recognised the Vicar, and had the natural dread which village boys of

seventy years ago not unnaturally felt for one who was not only charged with corporal authority, but was a keeper of the door of Paradise. To declare otherwise was to be a Ranter. You did not readily or lightly challenge a Vicar. A Vicar spoke a different language from your own—even from that of the man you knew familiarly. He used the same tongue as that employed by the still more remote and exalted person, clouded, Olympus-like, with glory of his own contriving, and consenting to the description of " Squire." To all such you touched your hat as to something made from a mould very different from that which had indelicately fashioned your own most worthless clay.

But this morning there came to Daniel that impulse to set aside his fear—at least of Vicars. For only a Vicar could tell him what he must know—*must*, if life was to be endured any longer. And so the long thin boy with the slow awkward gait halted and turned.

And now towards him came Henry Framlingham, Vicar of Oldborne, a small figure, yet, as we are told by those who remember, one in no way insignificant. He had a round face, red with exposure to weather, and a pair of blue-grey eyes set well back and shaded by thick eyebrows so that he could look at men from ambush. The mouth was large and drooped at the corners; one thought he should speak well. He walked with his hands behind his back, it being the way of men of his day to affect early the habits of middle-life. A big gold cross swung from his watch-chain. Lacking a swift and devising intellect, but with natural shrewdness and even with vision, Framlingham came to sound conclusions more often than not. He was professedly broad as befitted the period, but had a sneaking attraction to the noble and lonely figure whose shadow blessed the walls of the Oratory at Birmingham. There were Oxford memories of St. Mary's —and other things.

But now for twenty years he had done good to Oldborne, and if he could by any means do good to this boy who seemed to be loitering near, he was prepared to do it.

The day was of a kind he loved most in late May—with a blue sky untroubled by a single cloud. The throat

of a lark trembled with ecstasy overhead. A blackbird whistled with joy from a bush.

Framlingham responded. He was content, and in a momentary detachment rallied himself upon the fact of the ease with which this morning he found it possible to be tolerant. In a world so beautiful and so little troubled one could scarce do otherwise than smile and accept. Even that absurdly long, curious-looking boy who had brought the dressmaker's parcel, and who stood now trembling on his toes as if he wished to speak, must rejoice this morning.

And yet did he assume that too easily? He considered the boy quickly and shrewdly. For a long time he had had a suspicion. There had been, particularly, a scene in the village street: he, the Vicar, had rounded a corner and a group of boys had dispersed, leaving *this* boy, lonely, and as it might have seemed, stranded.

Yes, one might keep one's eyes open a little more. But young Windmill still waited; and so Framlingham took a step nearer.

"Well, my boy, what is it?"

He spoke in a low, harsh tone from which all harshness seemed to be removed by a rather pleasant smile.

"Well, you see," began the quivering giant, looking down at the small figure, "there wore something I wanted to ask."

"Yes? And what was this terrible question?"

"Would you moind me arskin' you somethin', sir? I reckon you'd know."

In these words he made the peasant's simple admission that Truth was in the keeping of this representative of the one Church by Law Established. Indeed it was more than that, for it was an acknowledgment of the completeness of the good man's knowledge.

"Well?" Framlingham was genuinely interested. This young fellow, Windmill, was obviously a person of suppressed intelligence: there was no missing the brightness of the eye.

"Well, sir," began Daniel, having drawn a deep breath, and who, in speaking, unconsciously began to kick a hole in the gravel path as he put his question—"I suppose in the next world we be all aloike?"

"Why, yes." Framlingham eyed the boy shrewdly. He was now really interested. But——

His own answer seemed to him a little hurried. He always remembered afterwards that he had cleared his throat; and somehow he wished he had not done so. It was a gesture of the pulpit; and on non-pulpit occasions he wanted to put aside all that.

"Alike? Well, yes, with qualifications. I have no doubt we shall all be afforded fresh scope for self-development, but just as our qualities are not the same, so may the opportunity vary. Those who, for instance, have had special opportunities to develop spiritually must, one supposes, be permitted a different field——"

"And there *won't* be any change?" nervously persisted the giant.

"Change?" cried Framlingham, with unintentional sharpness. (He always wished afterwards he had gone more slowly, investigated more patiently.) "Change? Of course there'll be a change. We shall all be changed. In a moment, at the last trump——"

He suddenly realised in what ritual he had become involved and set off in another direction. "We do not know. But we believe——"

"And shall we fare to *look* the same, do you mean, sir?"

"Certainly not, Windmill. Our bodies—our vile bodies as our fathers were taught to call them—will be no more."

Daniel drew a sudden long breath of relief. "That's what I mean, sir—that's what I mean. We'll be the same in——"

"The same?" cried the Vicar. He still eyed his questioner. "I wonder what you *do* mean, my boy. You run on about being the same. The same, the same?"

"The same *length*, sir," said Daniel. And that was what he meant.

For that brief interval two human souls seemed to have been brought into an intimacy. But somehow the occasion passed, leaving the man occupied with what became a perpetual and wistful surmise. Always afterwards Framlingham's mind turned to the moment as being the one in his

life when he had proved least adequate to his duty. He gave an answer and the boy went away. But I suppose the man, not less than the boy, remembered. And the man's mind often went back, and he wished for what he called a " second opportunity." Heaven, which is not unmerciful, does not always deny us a second opportunity.

III

Since that meeting with the Vicar, Daniel had grown older. There had been no second meeting. Framlingham had once tried to contrive one, but Daniel had run away. The parson watched the unsteady and retreating figure. That boy was using up his strength. Perhaps the effort exhausted his nervous force and even affected his intellect. The boy was growing too quickly; was, in fact, becoming quite a giant.

It was true. Daniel could have told him as much and much more—for instance, that the process of growing into a giant was accompanied by a purgatorial dose of mental suffering. Perhaps, however, Framlingham had guessed and did not need to be told. Perhaps it was only long afterwards that he came to definite conclusions, and wished that he had been told specifically and earlier.

The young man, as he was now, still went to church: strange to say, he liked going. He had, indeed, made the very curious discovery that when he sat in the dim building and looked up towards the altar he felt further away than at any other time from the turmoil and the trouble of the street. The boys were here, but they also were caught by something and did not trouble him, nor notice him. Also he liked to hear the Vicar's not unpleasantly harsh voice.

And he never forgot the consolation which the good man had afforded him on that only occasion of their having a talk. He liked church, and was only unhappy when the Old Testament lesson happened to be on the fall of Goliath. For Daniel was sorry for Goliath. . . .

IV

Standing at the street corner to-day, the giant considered the street which had so often been the scene of his humiliation that he had ceased to think of it save in that character. But now suddenly he found himself making a discovery. It was a discovery which for no reason that he could understand excited him as nothing had excited him before.

What he saw was the soft, white vision of a girl crossing the roadway and halting at "Laughter's Farm Dairy"—a late addition to the few shops of the village and standing a hundred yards away on the same side of the street as that on which he now lounged.

He found that, moved by this new and surprising excitement, he actually stepped into the roadway so that he could command a view of a beauty that, indeed, had pierced him to the heart. Who was she? Who could she be? In that form of the potential he re-shaped the question; was it really, was it possible, that such beauty could be in Oldborne and that even he, with his enforced remoteness from women, did not know it?

But certainly she had gone in at that door. He walked slowly and unsteadily in the manner of a man whose strength is insufficient to move his body, until he came to the door of the dairy. Yes—she was inside. Dimly he could discern a white shape. She must be the temporary hand there. He knew there was to be a temporary hand, because Polly Martin was ill and could not be back for a month . . . Polly Martin. The sight of this new beauty reminded him of the much cruder attractiveness of the other girl. Some general sense of femininity was excited in him.

Polly, he did not need to remind himself, had once spoken to him, had once smiled at *him*, Daniel Windmill, until his poor heart had leapt.

But the thought of Polly revived a dreadful memory. He saw the scene again. How often it had come back to him he did not care to tell himself. But whenever the sight of a girl stirred him he was first reminded and then made to experience that sense of repression.

He had gone into the shop one morning with a sort of growing boldness, and was feeling encouraged by Polly's smile, when suddenly there had entered Robert Lanes, six years the giant's junior, small for his age, very square of figure, with impudent eyes.

Robert looked insolently from Daniel to the girl behind the counter and drew her sympathy.

"'Lo, Daniel!" he said.

Daniel picked up his jug, answered "'Lo!" sheepishly, and moved towards the door. He was sick with the poison of the atmosphere suddenly created by that small ugly boy of fourteen. He remembered that Lanes had once got hold of him, and how strong the boy's muscles were and how impossible it had been to overthrow him. He had reached the door, had cast an agonised look back at Polly—a sight which she had missed, for she had immediately taken Robert Lanes's order—and was in the street ere a voice called him back.

"Daniel—you left suffen!" It was Lanes who called. Without suspicion, but in some confusion, Daniel turned and ran back.

"What did I leave?" he asked.

"You left the shop—hee, hee, hee," chuckled that horrible boy.

Daniel flushed nervously, tried to think of a retort which would reduce the effects of the ridicule in which he found himself being involved, and caught a glimpse of Polly, red in the face and with a vexed air suggesting that she felt shamed because a cavalier of hers could so easily be routed. Finally, unable to find a word to say, he had retreated into the street. He felt oppressed by a sort of ineffective anger. Also he knew he had lost Polly. (Girls were like that—girls of the common pattern.) Otherwise he had not been much disturbed.

But *this* new girl was different. She was without peer. A true description of her must unite every beautiful word that ever he had heard. She was white with the hidden fire of perfect whiteness. She shone.

He turned away. But he took his vague and sudden

vision of her with him. And for the next two days, when the boys were not about, Daniel haunted the corner to see her enter, and only confirmed his impression of a white divinity. He had managed at last to win a closer vision: he even believed at times that she must have seen him—though, of course, she would not condescend to individualise him.

Perhaps he would never speak to her—never.

CHAPTER II

I

DANIEL sat in the kitchen, his long back measuring the wall where it met the little crudely fashioned grate. It was a small, dim room with one minute, fixed window. The room being on the north side of the house, even in summer one never seemed to mind the flicker of firelight that his mother, from habit of her kind, kept alive through the day. A kettle was always near the boil, and sewing all day as she did, head bent over the round deal table, she needed the innocuous pick-me-up which the kettle provided.

Daniel looked at her now uneasily. A small woman with hair that had scarcely lost its original nut-brown, she gave the impression of taking up mysteriously little room. The mystery persisted till one had glanced again at the giant, whose ungainly form seemed to demand all the space that was available in the little, dark chamber. There she sat, her head bent, her small, yellow hands ceaselessly plying the needle, save when at long intervals the less engaged hand was stretched out for the teacup on the edge of the table.

Daniel wanted to speak. For he had something in his mind, and it concerned the dairy.

For a year or two now, as he had noticed, his mother had ceased to send him on boyish errands. For instance, she did not put on him the duty of fetching the afternoon skim on which, like their neighbours, they depended for their milk supply. It had not occurred to him at first that she thus sought to save him from ridicule, but when he had made the discovery he felt a passionate gratitude which would certainly have seemed, to one not aware of the special conditions, a little in excess of what was demanded. His mother, he told

himself fondly, did not know from how much she had saved him.

But his mind now was consumed with an idea about the dairy. His mother would presently rise and put on her bonnet. It was then that he must speak.

He waited until he saw the well-known signs, the removal of the thimble, the little weary pushing away of cloth and thread, and then, as though he anticipated her action, he spoke.

"Let *me* go, mother."

Suddenly she lifted her eyes. They were large eyes of a very dark brown, and shining: they lighted up the sallow face with its lined brow, they gave new beauty to the heavy, dark hair rolled over and behind the head; they conferred personality and a hint of mystery and attraction.

"You go?—No." And she began to reach for her bonnet.

"Yes, please. *I'll* go, mother. I'd—I'd *loike* to do that."

"No, no, son," and still she ignored him, until, seeing that he now had hold of the jug, she stood and eyed him with a new anxious surmise. Her gaze took on a curious steadiness which was characteristic. It was not the mere dull immovability of the bucolic observation, but showed a concentrated force of inquiry, a resolve to pierce, to examine, to spare nothing. Perhaps least of all would the operator spare herself.

"D'you mean you *want* to go?"

"Whoi, yes, mother, I do."

"But it ain't a thing I'd have thought a man would loike. Going there among the women and with children in and out of doors. It ain't what a man do. Not a man's work."

A man! Was he a man? Like others of his kind he was made ashamed by an ascription in his mother's mouth of something which lips of others would have withheld.

He flushed up as he began to answer: "I'd a fancy to go and do it."

"Very well." She resigned the journey, putting her bonnet away but certainly made curious.

And he went down the garden path in a tremor of anticipation, hungering for something soft and white and certainly

for ever unattainable. Yet he had a moment, too, for congratulation. Even now his mother had no idea. He repeated the thought: she had no idea of what his object was.

And again his mother had no idea of the risk to his peace which this simple action involved. For never once had he told her, he argued simply. She could have no suspicion that the boys laughed at him, called out at him, jostled him, and made a shame of him there in the High Street.

What would they do now that they saw him, like a new child let loose from school and doing a mother's errand? Well, to begin with they'd probably be at their dinner. For very luckily it was his mother's habit to go to the dairy at that hour rather than later, under an impression that you then got better value—the pick of the pail as she called it.

There were moments when he rallied himself with the thought that he had that to do to-day which should make him forget their cries. Yet some malignant whisper told him that their voices once heard would never leave him, but would ascend into any secret place where he might meet his woman; troubling his mind, insidiously qualifying its raptures, and making his arm, that might hold her as a man's should hold, fall weakly to his side.

For the moment, however, he was to have peace. When he reached the High Street he found it empty. Then with the utmost daring he approached the shop. Mabel Hathage . . . Mabel Hathage. . . . He had somehow picked up her name . . . Mabel.

II

There now she stood. In the doorway he drew a deep breath. He could feel his heart hammering, and his knees, never very sure, quivering. She was even more astonishingly beautiful than he had conceived her to be. It did not seem to him possible, indeed, that a woman should be created on this pattern.

He went forward, handed down his jug, wondered if she was surprised to see a man of his size on such an errand, hoped she might guess the truth, and, as the small brown hands did their service, he looked.

He could do no less.

He did not see clearly. If he had done so, he would have seen a girl rather below the average height standing with hands extended to the counter. It was a face of petal-like loveliness, a skin of perfect pink-and-white beauty: the eyes were deep and gleaming, the lips full and red. The figure was round and soft, the air subdued—deliberately, so one supposed, for there was something subtly receptive about the girl. It was not an ingenuous receptiveness. She studied Daniel at that leisure which his diffidence allowed her. But she was ready to receive him when he should have found courage to look down into her eyes.

But Daniel dared not look into her eyes. He could only absorb vague impressions. What he saw was her perfect rounded beauty, the white neck and the white arms which she uncovered daily in the dairy and was in no hurry to hide again. And seeing, Daniel could not remain silent. At the last moment he had, it is true, abandoned the idea of speaking to her: he did not see how it would be possible that she should speak to him. And yet there she stood glowing with sex. He looked down from his foolish height, though not, even now, into her eyes; swayed; put up a hand to the counter.

He supposed he had seen beauty before; but not beauty like this.

Tossing her head, she looked up at him.

"Well?" she said. He stammered out his order, but all the time he continued to look at her, at that white throat, at those soft, rounded arms that she extended over the counter so that he could look at them. She knew that he was looking at as much of her as he dared look at, and that he scarcely thought about his errand; and she took his admiration. But she did more than that, she took his admiration seriously. He drew a deep long breath, stretched out a big, bony paw towards the little brown hand, and touched it. The pretence was to take some change, but he had never taken change before like that—never been allowed to. His fingers touched hers and instantly fire ran through him. He was a man. She accepted him as such.

"Your fingers *are* soft." It sounded silly and he had meant to say, or he ought to have said, "Fourpence—right. Thank you."

"You've got a rare cheek!" she cried, withdrawing the soft hand, but doing it in such a way that its velvety softness passed over his red bony fist.

He flushed for a moment, thinking her angry; but then he discovered that she was still measuring him with her eyes, waiting, as it seemed, for him to do something. For a moment he hesitated—for what did one do? Then he leaned across.

"I say, Miss, let me go for a walk with you!"

"Biggest cheek I ever——" she giggled, though he would not thus have called her way of receiving his advances. She let her hand return to the counter, and now the giant, pushing out his big fist, tremulously captured it. The effect of its touch upon him was to charm, astonish, alarm. He felt a tingling in his extremities, his temples seemed to swell and he could hear his heart beating like a succession of blows on a door. He was intoxicated: he found himself gulping in an extraordinary way—a way that was totally inexplicable until he discovered that he was swallowing great draughts of intoxicating joy.

"You—you haven't answered me," he said. "You haven't, you know. I want you to say you will."

"When do you want me to come?"

"So you *will* come?" He had never expected it! He had thought hope had only been teasing.

"If you're good—one day—I don't know."

"Yes, but," he pressed now, the happy conqueror, "when for sure?"

"Where do you want to take me to?"

His heart bounded again. To what a position was she putting him already. *He* took *her*. He directed! He was a man! She had made him one. He must hasten to fulfil his part.

"I want to take you for a walk—somewhere quiet," he said boldly, and with only a single tremor; "perhaps the woods."

She pouted.

" I don't know that I loike——" she began.

" Oh, but I'll show you lots that's lovely in the woods."

" Well, if the day be foine and I be feeling loike it——"

He leant across the counter, and she let him now play with her hand and even admire her arm. There was a large dish of milk at her elbow and he looked from it to the arm.

" It be whiter than that there milk," he said.

She lifted her head.

" Men always say things loike that."

He smiled quickly and proudly and then frowned. He was a man—he was classed with men by this woman who must have the sway over many men and who could choose whom she would admit to the rank. But there followed a hideous fear that turned him sick.

" You mean—you mean that men have said things loike that to you. I mean——"

He stumbled helplessly, for when had he before been allowed to address a woman from a level common to other men? " I mean—I ain't the first? "

" You the first! Well, I loike that, I do. Why should you be the first? All the same," for his distress was visible, " I don't say that because every man say a thing, a girl care. It depend on the man."

Ah, that was it, decided this callowest of lovers. He smiled again. It depended on the man! He hadn't thought of that! She couldn't help being beautiful, and men couldn't help being in love with her beauty. So they *would* say things. But it would rest with her heart to decide whom of the speakers she would rejoice to hear.

" Those other men——" He began to feel grandiosely pitiful, in the way of a rich man who is being driven rapidly through a slum town—these other men were merely the denied. Men! that was the word. He was no longer one of a group of boys, and he was not merely a man set among or even below other men: he was a man elevated above the others.

And it had all happened in a flash. Within a miraculous ten minutes he had ceased to be a foolish and despised weak-

ling and had become the elect of the most perfect woman in the country.

" A girl get to know men in time," she was continuing, with a pouting air of wisdom, " and then she know who's just a chatterer."

" I'm not that anyhow," he declared boldly. Oh, that velvet loveliness of arm ! With what a trembling joy went forth his hand, his big, ugly, bony hand in whose ugliness he now found himself rejoicing, to touch that white arm so carelessly disposed upon the counter.

" I mean what I say," he announced resolutely. He had never thought of himself as being resolute.

" I know you do," she answered. The answer could bear what construction the hearer cared to put on it.

" I think—I think you be most beautiful." He often spoke in a way that some of those who heard him called " old-fashioned."

Mixing so little with his kind, or with those of his own age, he used little of their oafish modern vulgarity, their clumsy little double meanings. He spoke out of the directness of his heart. " You make me feel rale happy just to look at such beautiful arms as you have." Her eyes had grown small balls of fire burning into his soul. And she was taking long breaths : the power of his adoration seemed to be working the miracle of absorbing her.

" Your arms and your neck and your lovely eyes are all . . . foine like——" He paused because he was breathing hard.

" Go on," she said in a low thick voice.

" I shall always see you——"

Ting-aling-aling ! A clumsy bell fixed to force the door, whenever opened, to collide with it, sounded behind her over his head. He started back. That same boy, the small Robert Lanes with his evil gleaming eyes, entered the shop.

" Good-bye," Daniel said hurriedly ; " I'll be off."

He thought he saw Robert grin. But he did not look closely. The girl must witness no encounter between Robert and himself, must not realise how sick with fear his heart had become. In the street he drew a long breath. He had

escaped. She had seen nothing : she was new to the village and need suspect nothing.

But it had been a narrow escape. He had not missed the look in Robert's eyes. If he had not hurried away at once a scene would have been enacted similar to that hideous earlier occasion, ending, as before, in his own humiliation in the eyes of the girl behind the counter. Robert had certainly meditated a trick, and only his failure to have it ready had saved the object of his cruelty. Even at that moment the vile little creature might be whispering some slighting word in the ear of Mabel. But Daniel threw up his head proudly. She'd not listen ! Probably she'd tell the boy sharply that he said things he'd not dare to say in the presence of the big man—Daniel being the big man. Robert would try to laugh and she would order him out of the shop, and he might even go—sheepishly !

What then ? At that point he, Daniel, should be ready to meet and chastise his enemy. By a name not less honourable he characterised that absurd and puny figure in his mind. He must be ready. And he was *not* ready. He stood miserably swaying first on one foot and then the other, yet making no attempt to take home his milk. He waited for Robert, because now that he had had a minute to reflect he told himself that if he did not wait to speak to Robert there would sooner or later be some scene such as that which had once before been enacted in yonder dairy, and the details of which had been seared into his brain as with a white-hot steel. He must be ready to act, and he was not ready. It was always like that—always humiliation and futility.

Thus mercilessly he taunted himself ; and happily we have no power to taunt others as we can sometimes taunt ourselves. But his heart burnt now with a fury that was not the less because he knew that it was ineffective. Was he going to submit quietly, he asked himself, taunting again, to having withdrawn from him at the moment when he had gained it, the right, the glorious right of his manhood ? Suppose that on the very evening of his taking Mabel to the woods, Robert Lanes and some of his horrible little crew should come upon them and raise a cry, as they *would* do—

what effective answer could he make to them? The mere thought made him feel sick. . . . No, if anything was to be done, it must be done *now*.

Yet what could he do? What, he cried in agony of despair, had he ever been able to do? He had done nothing on the dreadful morning when they had called out after his mother as she had gone out with him to church: "It's your fault for not having a man." He had only flushed, and turned, and muttered, and earned a renewal of their laughter. She, too, had flushed and said, "Never mind." Mothers did; they were soft—like himself!

Well, but was he going to let a boy—a mere child—four years his junior, make him a laughing-stock? Hitherto he had done that very thing. He had submitted. Yet suppose he refused now to submit, what could he do? What would anyone else do? But then to no one else of his age would Robert Lanes have been impertinent. Robert was far too wise. He was only impertinent when he knew his impertinences were in no danger of being punished.

The giant walked clumsily ten paces away. Then he heard a step, and looking back, he saw Robert behind him.

"Hello, Dan'el," called the boy, very confident as usual.

Daniel chose to make no reply. His heart was filling. He was remembering; and there was so much to remember.

"Eh? Don't want to talk, eh?" said the boy, contemptuously making no attempt to decrease distance as he put on this air of truculence. "But I saw you making love to that there mawther in there, I did. Though whether she ever seen your face——"

Suddenly Daniel turned, pulling himself up to his great height and then swaying unsteadily just when he would have desired to look firmest. "That's enough," he said suddenly. "I've had—I've had mor'n enough from you, Robert Lanes."

"Have you? You'll get a bit more, lamp-post, before you go on. Yes, you will," coming closer to show how little the other's height appalled him. "I say I saw you. Whether *she* seen you, being a lamp-post too high for the top to be

spotted, I wouldn't just loike to say, but if she did see she must have been feelin' queer. As I were saying to her——"

"You dared to say anything?" cried the giant. He looked about him. He wanted to put his milk down, and the boy, reading his idea, encouraged it. "Yes. I dared. And I'll dare a bit more. And if you want to save your milk you just put it there on yon stone. Hey, Tom"—for one of his band of small, powerful ruffians had scented obscene entertainment and was already in attendance. "Here's the lamp-post a-tellin' me I'm not to speck a word when I've catched him—*him*—*that* thing—tryin' to be sweet to that gal Mabel in there."

It seemed to Daniel as if the world was suddenly darkening and closing in about him. He put down his jug and took an unsteady step towards his enemy, at the same time stretching out his long bony fingers towards the grimacing boy who still wore his contemptuous air of indifference. Robert Lanes waited till he felt Daniel's ineffective grip upon his arm. Then, still for a moment forbearing to move, he turned his small, evil, yellow, unboyish face with the deep oval eyes up into the other's with a sudden concentration of cruel passion.

"You want it, do you? You great toppling silly fool, you. *You* to go cuddling girls! You overgrown——"

Suddenly he gave a sharp spring, and his taut body came upon the big quivering giant like a shot. Daniel tried to maintain a footing, but spun back where the low, stooping back of the ally received the rear of his long shanks; and with no more ado he went over like a man falling backwards over a gate. With his native cunning Robert had planned a diabolically perfect climax. The giant was sent spinning backwards over the small strong back of Tom Higgins, while, as it seemed to him, night rushed together from either horizon. The next moment he crashed down upon the pavement, against his mother's milk-jug, overset it, broke it, and finally found himself among the splinters of crockery, which cut the skin of his neck.

And from a window of that dairy to which Daniel was now momentarily too occupied to be able to look back, the dancing

eyes of a girl watched the scene, the lips smiling, and the whole air that of one enjoying an entertainment.

III

In the meantime the enemy had contrived to withdraw a foot or two, since even big silly fools with weak arms might, in a sudden passion, and forgetful of their normal conviction of their own powerlessness (that conviction on which the like of Robert Lanes always acted so securely), hit out or use something like a knife. A thing of that kind was said to have happened in the case of Silly Jimmy, the old mad ex-sweep, whose brain had received its original injury when, as a boy, he had been the victim of the old cruel system of his trade, and who still doddered out at you if you hailed him jeeringly. So the victorious pair kept a proper distance while the giant, his neck running blood from a superficial wound, rose staggeringly to his feet. His eyes burned with anger and humiliation and sheer terror; but once he turned his glance away from his tormentors towards the door of the dairy. Could she have seen? That was his first thought. Then succeeded another terror lest his tormentors should have read his fear, and should try now to contrive that she should know. And it seemed as if, diabolically inspired, they *had* read—or at least as if Robert had.

"Yes. You can well look back—you heap o' muck, you big fool you! If only the mawther could spy you now with your milk-white skin that's all milk, or p'r'aps I ought to call it mother's milk. You better try it on me again."

Touched, stung, maddened, Daniel made a staggering step forward. But already his mind was clearer, and therein lay one source of his ineffectiveness. He knew when he was being defeated: he could never delude himself about this. If for five seconds he could be entirely blind to facts, he might act, do something, fight, kill! But his hideous presence of mind, his horrible awareness of himself and his surroundings, always proved his undoing. He was fated to be defeated and to read his fate. He knew he had been knocked out; that any further resistance would end in

further humiliation; and with his soul sick with ineffective hate, he looked for a moment hesitatingly at the enemy and then turned and set off for home. When they discovered that their victory was not to be further disputed, the heroes of it set up a sharp discordant cry and then began to approach again.

"If you want some more—you stalk, you weed! You just wait and we'll put you over again."

Other boys were listening and laughing and joining in, some of the smaller from a safer distance. "Don't you think 'cause you're a big feller you can bully *us!*" That was the cheapest of heroics and was declaimed by Robert himself. "*You* to think yourself a man—you big, silly ——" that was Robert's voice.

"Go home to your mother and ask her what she meant by dropping a thing like you."

At that, for a single moment, the tortured giant did pause. But then he hurried on again, and seeing that they kept close and still followed him beyond the village street, he suddenly began to run. He had not really meant to take to flight until he had set off. But he now suddenly became mastered by an impulse to escape. When he had run five paces it struck him like a new blow that here was the final ignominy. But his poor long legs, once started, seemed as if they acted independently, for, while he ran, that hideously clear mind of his told him plainly what he did, characterised vigorously the spectacle he made—he, the tall young man, pursued by a company of small boys who called what they willed, and threw stones as they chose without a fear in their hearts that at any moment he would turn. They knew he would not turn—just as he knew it himself. And not for a moment did they pause in their pursuit. Down the lane ran hunted and hunters, the roadway ringing with the beat of their iron-shod feet, the dust flying as it should have done for some more gallant show than this. Never was seen such a spectacle, and within the heart of that poor flying fool of a giant there whispered a voice merciless, unanswerable, so that he ran dimly conscious that more than these boys looked on in ridicule; that some obscure, lurking spirit of the

universe, making its natural demand for the observance of a moral dignity in the affairs of its creatures, watched protestingly.

Presently, before him, loomed Sanctuary. He knew it even as that intellect of his divined a new humiliation for him in its reminder that what he ran to was his mother's apron. The gate before him was his mother's gate—beyond it he would be safe, free from pursuit. He dashed on. It may have occurred to him that the pursuit never aimed at overtaking him. If it had done it must have long since succeeded, since his pace on those long, weak legs was really slow enough. His pursuers wanted him to make them sport, and he made it by being kept in motion without ever being caught. When they saw his mother's gate appear they slowed into a walk that finally, as he breasted the gate, became a halt.

Curiously enough they forbore to throw further stones : they even contented themselves with only a milder form of abuse, and as he gathered up his strength to reach the front door he tasted a final humiliation, the outcome of his ability to torture and to abase himself : they feared a little his mild mother : there was something about her, some essential dignity, which their young years could not comprehend ; and what a boy cannot understand, he fears.

With exquisite bitterness he realised the reason for their halting. That small, tired-looking woman, deadly pale under her yellow skin, with the troubled brown eyes and the black eyebrows under the crown of dark hair, who came to the door as he reached it, that woman who sometimes had to hold a table to support herself, was stronger than he ! He could not defend her : if there was to be defence, she must defend him—as her door defended him now.

CHAPTER III

I

BEHIND his mother's door the giant drew a long breath. His brain was something he had never been able to understand. Its working always perplexed him; for one part of it was all turbulence, while the other maintained itself in perfect order. That latter part of his mind remained calm, perceptive, even judicial; and it was by means of this undisturbed intelligence that he was made aware of the emotions now pursuing one another through his head.

What emotions they were! There was the sweet, passionate sense of the white arms, the glowing neck, the magic eyes of the girl who had taken him captive. There was that sudden, succeeding, sharp humiliation—yes, sharp like a cruel knife. And finally there was that reverberating sense of the ignominy which had smothered his interlude: the pursuit of him as if he were something sorry and absurd; something that men, because they did not trouble to pursue, spat at. Thank God, Mabel did not know. And thank God——

But another woman knew, or would soon know. How to withhold knowledge from his mother became his absorbed intent. . . .

"You're out o' breath! You've been runnin'! *Woi* have you been runnin'?"

And suddenly the pale face grew paler. "Sars o' mine! you've cut your neck. What *have* happened, Daniel?"

"Nawthen. That be to say——" The sweat rose on his brow like a stream, and the muscles of his racked face trembled. "I had a spill. Like a botty fule I tripped up, and knocked over the milk and came down on the jug."

He was, curiously enough, delighted that there was some part that was true in what he said, as are all who love truth but for some reason must tell it not.

But a mother's eye pierces where nothing else known to man can go. This mother made no other comment than to stand there and search him with her deep brown eyes, steadier indeed than he could remember them ever to have been, invincibly steady, and never so relentless.

"What's the truth?" she said at last very slowly; and then waited.

"I've—I've told you, mother. There's no more to say. But"—for he must make a great show of words if ever he was to escape her questioning—"I must go and wash off this here mess."

She still waited. And then because obviously no more was coming from him, though she was accustomed to his surrendering at last to these maternal inquisitions of hers, she seemed to yield. "Very well. I'll get you some warm water." And slowly, with a sedateness which he found somehow terrible, she moved across to the grate and began pouring a little from the kettle steaming as ever on the hob.

"Here's your water," she said. "Get the ole flannel out of my room." She did not offer to do anything for him. Perhaps she had read his mind enough to know that he would not wish to be helped.

II

It had long been the giant's grief that his mother's income decreased annually when it should have grown. At her husband's death, and while still a young woman, Mrs. Windmill, with the good-will of her neighbours, who held it hard upon a young woman to lose so early the use of an income-earning husband, and with it that life of comparative ease on which she might be supposed to have counted, had removed herself to Gippeswick, where she became established in the town as a dressmaker. Her costume conceptions were her own, and while they were neither novel nor artistic, they served the needs of her customers. Numbers of her

neighbours from Oldborne came over to her, and she soon had what is technically described as a " connection."

But the generation which provided business for this young woman gave way to a new generation, and the new generation found their dressmaker no longer young, and little in touch with the taste of the hour.

Hence at last the lower shop must be let, and business be carried on from the little room above in the struggle to maintain a position, the surrender of which, finally, was to be marked by retirement to Oldborne.

While Daniel had been growing up, his mother had been using the room over the old shop, in which now flourished a pert young woman, who described herself as " late of Snellshall and Swansdown, Regent Street, London." (After fifty years that shop is still there, still with its claim to association with the great, though Madame the Proprietress has removed her personal sign and superscription to a five-foot slab of granite in the churchyard.)

The pert young woman often remitted her tasks to " her woman upstairs," otherwise " one of my hands." But Mrs. Windmill paid rent to Miss Pert for the room where she did her work; and Miss Pert one day announced that the front room must be surrendered.

" I'm going to open a millinery department," she announced. " You can still have the back room if you like."

" I couldn't work there. And besides, three rooms are little enough to live in and have my son with me."

" Then I'm afraid——"

" Very well," said Mrs. Windmill. She decided that she must return to Oldborne and rely on the custom of her old friends there; and so, after some difficulty, she found a cottage outside the village. Living there, she could still keep Daniel beside her, and it was essential that she should keep Daniel under her eye.

Some schooling she succeeded in getting for the boy, since the village was lucky in having what not every village possessed in those pre-Schoolboard days—a National school. But the master presently recommended Daniel's removal,

and the Squire, dropping in one day, and noticing the boy, was asked to give a final judgment.

"Certainly," he said at once. "He looks ridiculous! He must be six foot already; a perfect giant. Preposterous. Not fair to the smaller boys. There might be bullying."

Perhaps there was; but possibly not in the sense imagined by the Squire, nor done by the imagined principal.

What to do with Daniel now became the mother's care. She found him work upon a farm. But this was at the very time that he was growing fastest, and one day at the end of two months he had a fainting fit which cut short his career as an agriculturist. In perplexity she took him to a doctor. "You ought to keep him out of doors. Don't put him in a shop, whatever you do! He wouldn't live a twelvemonth. Can't he grow vegetables or something like that?" The doctor was a man who had grown fat on the afflictions of a wide countryside, to which he ministered by means of (*a*) a horse and dogcart, and (*b*) a set of half-a-dozen prescriptions, one or other of which met the needs of every sickness, from threatened heart failure to a twisted toe joint. He frowned now, as if he was not sure that the issuing of this prescription of a vegetable farm was not too bold a departure from the habits of a lifetime to be fully justified. But he decided to stick to it.

"Yes, my good Mrs. Windmill, it's all you can do. Frankly it is. That son of yours will never be any good in the ordinary way unless he has ten years of quiet to gather his strength. I'm not too hopeful even then. But if you can keep him taking it easy till he's, say, twenty-eight or thirty, why, we'll not despair. Otherwise——"

And so Daniel grew vegetables, and took his produce into the village, and made nothing in the nature of an income. At first he was little troubled by this last fact, but at last, seeing how his mother was involved, he was much troubled.

For of late he had begun to observe his mother. She stooped more; the work of her needle seemed to draw her eyes nearer to it than of yore; and there were times when her natural pallor became like the pallor that he had always imagined must be that of death.

"You're doing too much," he said. "You're doing too much. I hate to see you. It's using up all you've got of strength. You do be wearin' away."

She looked up from her work, and he noticed how thin her be-pricked fingers were. She wore a certain curious air of indomitability rather than of defiance to fate.

"It's easy to talk," she said. "But there's a little word '*must*.'"

When she spoke she often used these curious little whimsies of speech.

"Then I'm going to get somethin' else."

She considered him with that reserved tenderness of hers. She was a mother who must have known her son different from others, yet sought to give him the full ascription of a man.

"I don't think you'd find that easy. Work's hard to get these days."

He knew she didn't quite mean that. What was in her mind was that work for an incompetent and a weakling would be hard to get.

His life was conditioned, and must always be, by the simple physical fact that his strength was scarcely enough for him to carry his great burden of bones, let alone to perform a task which would yield him wages. They had told him wherever he had gone—some with a kindly consideration for which he was grateful, others with a contemptuous pity, and others with a brusqueness which ought, he felt, to have been spared him—that he was no good to them.

The draper eyed him up and down. "*I* couldn't employ you here, my lad. I want little handy fellers."

The farmers all said the same. "You ain't strong enough. It's rough hard work. You broke up before."

"I could do it *now*," he asserted boldly.

"Not you! You don't know. I can see you'd break up sudden. It's as much as you can do to carry *yourself*."

It was true; and he had taken his dismissal with a sob in his throat. But looking at his mother, he determined that he must not allow her longer to wear out sight and hand and heart for him. All the same he had no notion how to act nor where to go. He had tried so often, and each time

he had been returned to the mean futility of his back garden and his few hens—melancholy birds, the eggs of which the boys stole or sometimes, in the pure malice of their hearts, broke.

He had been meditating a renewed effort to establish himself more securely when he had discovered Mabel Hathage. Lying on his back in his little room on that night following his day of mingled pride and shame, he had reconsecrated himself to the idea that he must find employment. For now there seemed to be a double incentive. Separate motives which seem friendly have a way of discovering opposition and finding a battle-ground. But of this truth he was ignorant. Mabel had not, he reflected, asked him yet what he did for a living, but, if she was curious, she could easily find out. And one might assume her curiosity. A girl does not consent to go out with a man (a man !) in whom she is so little interested that she does not inquire his occupation. If Mabel were to go out with him she would be consenting to the possibility that she might some day stand in such a relation to him that his means of living would be all-important to her.

In some such way the giant argued. Yes, he must earn a real living. He did not add, "so that he could support her." He merely allowed the thought to hover deliciously on the outskirts of his mind. To think of his relation to her in too concrete a form seemed to him a kind of profanation of her beauty and innocence. She must be thought of as something remote, exquisite, and not to be anticipated. He feared to anticipate—feared with a superstitious dread. And he only allowed the thought of her to come close when he needed it to help him to forget for a moment the bitter torment inflicted by the boys. He grew hot and cold with every memory of them; and each time he saw himself turning with terror at the street corner, lest she should have been witness of his humiliation, he trembled and grew sick. It seemed to him that something rose and then died within him. It was as if he himself first enjoyed a rapture and then suffered the torture of death. Finally, he was assured that she could *not* have seen.

But his mind came back to the resolve that he must earn; he must be self-supporting. Perhaps then, even these petty persecutions would cease. He would have established himself in the minds of his neighbours as a man of substance. They might even yield him respect.

Yet it mattered little what *they* did. Two persons alone were important—two women. With an income, he could hold up his head. But more than that, he could save his mother from wearing herself further, and could possess the right to approach Mabel as another man might approach her. How these two motives seemed to march together; and in what amity! He rose early with a fixed determination.

Life is a curious business, and sometimes even isolated facts are strangely influential. Perhaps when he stood up after consuming the too liberal breakfast which by some miracle his mother's ceaseless care for him provided each morning, he did not know that his mind was registering an indelible impression of the woman who had already slipped thimble to finger to begin the work of the day.

Yet standing there, his moon face among the rafters, he was unusually and freshly impressed by the fact of her increasing fragility. He saw, without individualising symptoms, the sunken temples, the thinness of the wrists, the hard, troubled breathing. Perhaps because of late he had taken to observing his mother more closely, he had failed to take the same note of himself as of old. It was only as he went forth on the new quest, and as he came to the threshold, that a fact became forced on his attention. Stepping through the doorway he caught his forehead on the lintel. He stopped. He was accustomed to bumping his head, but to-day he was puzzled. He thought he had learnt the lesson of the doorway and had practised the precise stoop necessary to get himself through unharmed. But now he remembered that this was not the first time of late that he had bumped himself.

Of three things, one. Either he had been careless, and he did not think he had been; or the lintel had sunk, and that could scarcely be; or, he *had grown*. At that thought

he paused and stood there for a moment absorbed. Then, very quickly, he went out.

He had a purpose, but was still without a notion of how to execute it. When he reached the High Street the slow activities of its day had begun. Boys went to and fro with baskets: here and there a shopper, earlier afoot than most and set on the pick of the market, was already turning the joints on the butcher's counter, or casting a judging eye on the fish. A tailor's assistant—for Oldborne kept its own hunt-tailor—with head aslant, stood in the roadway judging the latest disposition of his models, and a bread van was being loaded up for the morning delivery. At all these signs of an organised activity Daniel, the excluded, cast an envious eye.

These sights had power to stab. It seemed as if the whole world had not only its task but its properly remunerated task: he alone remained futile on the outskirts of this traffic. It was, perhaps, a minor traffic, and one in which those who handled it found little to appreciate. Doubtless that snip would have preferred to be idling somewhere far away where there were girls and a pier; and conceivably that chemist confessed to himself that if he could but have had his time over again he would have found a life which did not chain him eternally to counter and shop, and expose him to be called up at all hours of the night for a fee that was less than a quarter of the one earned by his fellow-healer the physician. It was easy to assume a general discontent, and the presence here, as elsewhere, of that universal notion that, given a wider theatre, one would have achieved something much nearer happiness than what was one's experience to-day. Echoes of such discontent had often reached Daniel's ear. He had read it in the weary faces or in the envious gaze that had watched some lolling hobble-de-hoy of the well-to-do, from one of the big houses, drive by with coachman and footman before him—those liveried puppets, those non-men—the active young person, the footman, ready to spring from his seat as the carriage drew up before one of these shops to assist the young man, his master and owner, to alight.

Daniel studied the general discontent with profound amazement. The fools! The blind fools! Each had his place and his value! Each one but the giant! Daniel knew nothing of economics, and to have been told that these men had each his part in a constituted, if an improperly constituted, economic system would have meant nothing to him. What he knew was that these men had jobs for which they got pay—a living wage; and that *he* was merely an unwilling idler, a cumberer of the earth who was forced to sit and see his mother use up the strength which should have gone to maintain her own precarious vitality, in stitching and cutting out that she might buy the mere necessities of existence, not only for herself but for him, her son, the said cumberer of the earth.

He stood at the street-end, watching. Some of the boys, whom he knew, were about; and he dreaded to excite their ready derision, with their minds fresh with memories of the day before. Perhaps *she* had heard. But if she had not seen (and he was sure she had not) he was convinced that she would not believe. No one who did not know the actual truth about his sheer abject physical weakness would credit the story that a horde of boys had put this very tall young man to flight. The thing, happily, sounded impossible. On that seeming the giant relied.

It was no intention of his to visit the dairy. He dared not. He must be in a more heroic mood than that in which he found himself. If he could have avoided this street to-day he would have done so. But it was necessary that he should come here: urgent, even, if the relation which he planned to Mabel Hathage was to make any progress. Here only in Oldborne was there a chance of employment. If ever he was to keep himself, keep his mother, or keep—keep a wife (he let the thought finish with a strange delicious thrill), he must wrest work from some employer in this street. For in Daniel's day men went but little into distant cities, and their idea of an economic situation at all relevant to themselves embraced nothing more than the conditions maintained in their own

village, and observed by the few squires and masters who lived within a mile or two of the village street.

Daniel so far had no plan. But a plan came to him while yet he loitered at the street-end. The farmers would not have him, or would pay him only scarecrow's wages, and he could earn as much with his sale of home-grown produce. He was sick to death of importuning the farmers. "What good 'll you be? A lot o' use *you* were to old Gallowsgill! He wore telling me. A scarecrow—that's what *you'd* do for." Or, if they were kinder, "You stick to your taters, lad. You ain't the build for *our* sort o' work." One of them, a little more perceptive than the rest, had looked him up and down reflectively. "You're growing too fast—that's what you are. You keep your strength, lad. . . . I know it be hard." He did not explain what he meant when he used that rather perilous note of sympathy. This was Deeks, an ancient and a personality. Of him it was told that after waiting for rain, and the rain at last coming, he gave a grunt of satisfaction: "I couldn't have done it better myself!" Deeks was the last of the farmers to reject Daniel.

But the mind of Daniel had now conceived a scheme which, if it could be carried into effect, would leave him with nothing but gratitude that in the past the farmers had refused him. It was a scheme so ambitious that, if he had not had an impulse to put it at once to the test, he doubted if he would ever have had the courage to move at all.

It was a scheme so grandiose, indeed, that he marvelled all the time that he walked the distance which should bring him to the place where he could begin to carry out his idea. Significantly he paused before the only door in the High Street that was covered with the brass plates of professional men.

By using, as now he did, these narrow dark stairs conducting to premises over shops, he was able to reach the landing, and peering, now, at the legends painted in black on either hand, he was able to discover wherein sheltered respectively Robert Bryce, Land Surveyor, and Thomas Morrison, Solicitor and Commissioner for Oaths.

The scheme which the suddenly-bounding ambition of Daniel Windmill had bade him execute was nothing less than an attack upon the professions. If the farmers would not have him, perhaps the lawyer would: if the draper threw him out, perhaps the surveyor would take him on.

Between the pair he hesitated. Of neither did he know anything, still less did he have a notion of what would be expected of him by either. But he remembered that he had heard that when there was nothing to choose between people, the habit was to take them in alphabetical order.

At Bryce's door he knocked feebly. For some little time no notice was taken of his mild assault, and he was considering whether to renew his request for attention, when a small young man with a narrow chest, made to look narrower than it actually was by the tightly buttoned coat, opened and looked at him with unamiable inquisitiveness. He had, Daniel discovered, an unpleasant squint, and a long nose, at the tip of which his eyes seemed to be trying to unite their gaze. He had carious teeth, for dentistry was backward in that day when chemists could report good business in toothpicks; and he spat on the ground before he asked Daniel what he wanted.

"I wore a-goin' to ask to see Mr. Bryce," Daniel began.

The little clerk looked up at him slowly, beginning with his feet and making a business of the scrutiny. Probably he had some dim previous notions of Daniel—the longest-legged thing in Oldborne, indeed something of a freak.

"Client?" he asked suddenly and sharply, in what was probably a Cockney accent.

"What say?" asked Daniel.

"I said, Client?"

"No, my name be Daniel Windmill."

He guffawed.

"You must be a natural, or something. I asked you if you wanted to see Mr. Bryce on business."

"Yes, please," said Daniel eagerly. He was horribly conscious of this unpleasant-looking young man's eyes, which having, beyond the end of his nose, united their gaze in the bonds of some unholy alliance, seemed now to be

looking for new fields of unclean employment, and to be suspecting that they had found it in the elongated person of Daniel Windmill.

"You wanted to see 'im, eh? I dessay. A lot of people want to see 'im that *don't* see 'im. Just as a lot of people that don't want to see 'im over the wye *do* see 'im. We're diff'rent. You'd never think there'd be anybody that wouldn't want to see *me*, would you?" he finished truculently.

"I—I don't know," answered Daniel, to whom it was at least clear that this young man had no friendly feeling towards him.

"Well, whatever you know or think doesn't matter much. For you don't see Mr. Bryce till you've given me what them opposite 'ud call a full, true and particular account of what you want to see him abaht."

"But I want to speak to him," insisted the caller.

The clerk laughed gutturally. "I dessay. What abaht, though? What for do you wanter see 'im?"

Daniel considered. It seemed to him that he couldn't very well force his way in. That would scarcely earn the good-will either of this clerk, his possible future colleague, or of the young man's master.

"Trewth to tell," he decided to explain, "I be a-lookin' for a job."

The clerk fell back a pace, as if at all costs he must get a better view and at the same time support himself, while he submitted to a severe drain upon his intellectual and spiritual resources.

"Looking for a job. 'Old me tight! Oh, mother, 'old me! Looking for a job. And yer thought—yer thought yer'd find it *'ere?*"

"Well," Daniel tried to persist, but he found it almost impossible to do so in face of the vitriolic contempt now being emptied upon him by those crooked eyes. "Well, there bain't no harm in tryin'."

He laughed weakly, and a moment later was angry with himself. Why must he always show weakness in the face of ridicule?

"No 'arm in trying?" echoed the clerk. "We don't want a fire-escape 'ere. Nor a lamp-post; nor yet half a mile of string pulled out to look like a man."

"All the same," Daniel persisted now, "you needn't be rude, need you? I'm not tryin' to offend you."

"No, and you'd better not try it on. Not that *I'd* do anything, you silly big weed. I'd call in one of the lads off the street. Weren't you the thing I saw scared down the street by the infant school?"

Daniel flushed, took a step forward angrily, and then, seeing the clerk's arms coming towards him, he drew back, grew red from anger with himself at the defeat, and again made to approach. He was wondering whether the clerk would in fact throw him down the stairs, when he saw that young person recoil. The next moment, looking behind him, he discovered an elderly man with a big muscular figure and with red eyes and a rough beard, completing his ascent of the stairs. The man stopped and stood looking from one face to another.

"What's all this, Jimson?" he asked coldly.

"It's—it's this thing—person, sir," began Jimson at once. "Wanted to see yer, sir. Wanted *work*, sir." He said the last words as if they involved at least a proposal for an action of a directly felonious intent.

"Wanted work," repeated old Bryce; "well, it's not a thing *you* ever wanted."

"I beg your pardon, sir," began Jimson. "I 'ope you don't mean——"

"I mean," said Bryce in a harsh, shrill accent that alarmed Daniel, "that if there's a more idle, more useless, uglier, filthier blackguard on this ugly, filthy earth than you, my eyes are getting too old for me to see him."

"Oh, sir," cried Jimson, reduced to a sob.

"Yes, oh, sir! Oh, sir, indeed! Think you'll get your articles, and that then you'll succeed to me. Poison me or something, I suppose. Well, don't be too sure. And now, young man," thrusting a finger at Daniel, "what do you think *you've* come here for? There's a lot of you. Want to be office boy, eh? If that's your idea——"

"I want work, sir. Any kind of work."

"I daresay you do. Lots of folk do. Everybody wants work till he gets it, and then his one idea is not to do it. No, no, one loafer is enough in this office. Whoever sent you to me was a fool, and you can tell him so."

"Nobody sent me, sir. I came myself."

"Then you're the fool. And you can tell yourself so."

"You mean, sir, you couldn't consider——"

"Consider!" The old man had raised his voice. "Consider! I'll consider sending for a policeman if you stay much longer in this office. Here," and suddenly he changed his manner, "what's your name?"

"Windmill, sir. Daniel Windmill."

"What?" For one moment he seemed pulled up in his devastating charge of wrath. Though Daniel knew it not, the old man was in the habit of thus getting a second wind of fury. His accent was momentarily mild. "You're the son of that woman who came back here from Gippeswick and that couldn't make ends meet? Why, I suppose I must know you then."

"Mayhap you do, sir," answered Daniel, suddenly hopeful, "and it's because of my mother——"

"Yes. And what, pray, have you been doing since you were a boy? Nothing good, I'll be bound."

Daniel began an explanation, but the old man cut him short.

"No good. If you were to be any good to me you'd have had to come here seven years ago; begun as an office boy like this filthy swine here. Had any training as a clerk?"

"No, sir."

"None?" demanded the old man with a new sharpness, his eyes gleaming, his nostrils scenting, as it were, the first breath blown from some new corner of the battlefield. "And you've the impudence to come and bother me when you don't know the first thing about an office?"

"That's what I were saying, sir," Jimson began to plead.

"Silence!" cried his master, turning again to Daniel.

"Do you suppose that a man simply slips on to an office stool and begins to be paid for going to sleep on it? Perhaps you saw that blackguard of mine. Well, don't make any mistake. I don't have a second of his kind here, not I! And now having taken up my time for two hours at least, think yourself lucky that I don't make you pay me five guineas for my attention, and get yourself downstairs."

Daniel did not lose a minute. He turned and hurried down, while from above came the reverberations of a wrath that now, and very willingly though probably with a fastidious self-approval, fastened again on the wretched Jimson for its discharge. Obviously there was nothing here for him. A man of his age hoping for employment in an office must be able to claim experience.

He had none. And so ended his great new idea.

But suddenly he remembered. There was another man on that staircase—the solicitor, Morrison. He knew Morrison by sight, and even knew him by repute for a considerate soul. Dare he adventure up those stairs again?

He hesitated. Then he retreated to the pavement outside. Then looking towards the street he saw in dream a figure in white crossing yonder roadway, and he turned back. He must show himself a man: he must prove worthy.

But as he ascended the stairs the giant went with caution. He had no wish to see again either the unspeakable Jimson or his insanely choleric master. And he dared scarcely breathe when at last he stretched a hand to knock on Morrison's door. For the sound would probably be heard across the passage, and might arouse Bryce's clerk, if not the old fury himself. But things fell out better than he had dared to hope. At the first gentle knock the door opened, and a clerk with watery eyes, a neat mild exterior, and an air of precision, said without enthusiasm: "Well, and what can I do for you?"

"I wish to see Mr. Morrison, please."

"Oh! Well, I can't say if he will see you. What would be the name?"

"Daniel Windmill." The man frowned, though whether

the name meant anything to him the visitor could not feel sure.

"Wait there, please." And the clerk, going to a door marked "Private," knocked and then entered.

Daniel stood, hat in hand. He thought how pleasantly his present reception contrasted with the earlier one. And as he stood fingering his hat, and, observing the precision of everything in this room, began to come under the influence of its oppressive legality, its curious and subtle air of propriety, he found himself newly disturbed. The long shelf of solemn, and indeed heavily-impressive-looking volumes on themes of law, the steel strong-boxes with their efficiently painted legends in black paint, the safe, the long oak desk with its sunk ink-wells under the window, the neat files—all seemed to combine to give him a sense of a life entirely outside his experience or comprehension. He saw suggested a system founded upon the very bedrock of Time, a hint of the mystery of the past. Here, throned, seemed to sit Law and Custom. It could never be any place for him. He marvelled at the effrontery which had brought him here at all. He wanted to flee. It seemed the only thing to do. And when he heard the clerk opening the door of the private office to return, he prepared a speech, in which he was to say that he suddenly remembered he must be somewhere else at that precise moment.

"Mr. Morrison will see you. This way, please."

The giant stumbled after his guide, and a moment later he faced a small pale man, with wide-stretched ears and yellow and grey side-whiskers cut primly, who said blandly, from carefully acquired habit rather than native geniality:

"Well, and what can I do for you?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Daniel plunged at once even before the clerk had retreated. "I be looking for employment. And I wondered whether you——"

He stopped. He became suddenly aware that the lawyer's eye was considering him in a sort of cold, shocked astonishment. It was again as if, in asking for work, he had been guilty of some obscure but positive indecency.

And he knew that behind him the clerk, too, had suffered,

and waited in the hope that his master's reply would assuage the injury.

Mr. Morrison did not say, "Do I hear aright? Is it possible that there has been admitted to the office—to *this* office of *mine*—steeped as it is with the note of a complete efficiency and sanctified by Time itself, one so light-minded that he could suppose that he, without a single claim to experience, with no pretence to having served the required novitiate, could be given employment here?" But if this was not his spoken word, it was the idea eloquently conveyed by his manner.

And at last, escaping from the trance into which eventually the shock had thrown him, he did summon speech sufficient to begin to convey his feelings.

"You mean," he said softly, "that you want *me* to employ you?"

"Whoi, yes, sir," stammered the giant, who even before being admitted to the room had begun to suspect that he was involved in some enormity.

"You have had a long training as a clerk," Morrison's voice was now softer than ever, "as a clerk in a lawyer's office; you are competent to do books on the double entry system; you have some elementary knowledge of conveyancing and common law; you could, if necessary, compose a letter in any one of four manners——"

"No, sir. No," broke in the alarmed giant. "I'm afeard, sir, I ain't larnt anything of——"

"You have no knowledge?" Still the voice was soft, purring. Daniel wished it would rise, even that it would ascend to a scream like Bryce's—anything but this strange, disconcerting, ironical softness.

"You know nothing of the law nor of procedure in a lawyer's office . . . you do not even possess an elementary knowledge of ordinary commercial routine, petty cash, banking. You are, in fact, entirely incompetent, and yet you have the effrontery, the gross impertinence—I cannot otherwise describe your action—to come here and take up my clerk's time, and mine, while you explain what you do not know and your complete uselessness!"

"I'm won'erful sorry, sir," began Daniel.

"You will best show your sorrow by immediately removing yourself, and by undertaking never to come here again."

"Yes, sir." That at least this poor incompetent was competent and glad to do.

He went at once, and looked only in front of him till he was safely in the street below.

And only then did Daniel realise that the relief he felt at escape from that scene of specialised knowledge was really something incidental to a final ending to all his brave new hopes.

He wasn't wanted—anywhere. Let him seek to comfort his mother as he might, to do his duty by her, there was nothing that he could do, none to employ him. He wasn't wanted, and his mother could die. He hurried away from the High Street. But once out of that thoroughfare, the giant hesitated; and only casually did he notice a thin dark man who watched him.

The thought of going straight back to the cottage, where inevitably he must see his mother bending over her work, and as it seemed to him preparing herself to die at it, became intolerable. He would not return there. He would seek relief in the only place where was consolation, the deep woods where God walked, and sometimes consented to show Himself even to poor useless giants. For Daniel, like many lonely souls, had his own theology. It could not be called a system of theology, since it must have contained many mutually destructive tenets. It embraced theories gloomily achieved one day and lost the next; it founded itself on perceptions that were clear some early mornings when there was bird-song to give them reality, and that became obscured in the heavy noon. There is, for many of us, a rapture of the early morning when the earth comes to us fresh out of its cleansing mists: presently the experience passes, but we recognise that it is nearer truth than the experiences that follow through the day. For the giant, all depended, and depended permanently, on an ever-active intuition.

For his ideas of the Person of his Creator he still went to the theology of his mother. For his living and rejoicing sense of the Immanence of God he looked only into his own heart. If you had told the giant that God was not to be felt in there among the trees, or that He was not to be heard when the lark sang above the shining yellow mists, he would not have believed you. Why he had been made this impossible length so that he could not serve his mother nor himself, and so that he was a sight for tears or laughter, he did not know. But God knew. For obscure, and good, and even beautiful reasons this thing had been put upon him. Moreover, he did not see how things could ever be any better. Even the Vicar could not assure him that in the next world he would be the same length as his fellows. But after much thought over his talk with the reverend man he had reached a conclusion on which, ever since, he had rested.

At the last day one's soul united with one's body—and here was one's body. It was, therefore, with this body that he must unite again. The difference would be in this wise: if he must unite with the body it would not, *then*, be to his humiliation and shame. In that next life he was clearly promised triumph and joy. There would then be no small, mean conspiracies to degrade him. If he stood taller than others, the fact might even be for his greater glory.

So in the years that had followed his boyish challenge to the Vicar he had developed a theory of the life beyond. As he had grown up, however, his conceptions becoming in the natural course of things less rigid and ingenuously natural, he had come to accept a less detached and concrete statement, and satisfied himself that in the next world, at least, his happiness was secured. Wandering among the trees, comparing leaf with leaf, watching the habits of birds, or lying flat upon the turf to follow with his eyes a red ant that went upon its business, he preserved his conviction of the essential beauty and unity of the creation.

But momentarily to-day his confidence refused to return to him when he came to these woods. He reached them,

as he knew afterwards, in the wrong spirit, for he came unhopeful of finding ease. And so, from the oppression upon his heart, he could not escape. Forgetting his consolations—the promise that the trees and birds had given—he began a great misinterpretation of their message. His text was that he was useless. In a world where every man had a part and place, there was no part nor place for him.

If he died, then it could only be for the best for all: for while his mother would suffer, some well-to-do person in the village would probably come forward to aid the widow who had been deprived of her son's support. And *he* would be quit of the ridicule and this sense of utter futility which burdened him. He flung himself upon the ground. If only he could die! For what lay before him if he lived? Suddenly he half raised himself as a new dark thought came. (We naturally change our posture as ideas move before our minds: it is as though we require a new physical perspective to examine them.) Mentally the giant had been going back to the events of an hour ago—he had been thinking of the lesson he had learnt first in the surveyor's and then in the lawyer's office—the lesson that he was useless. But now he remembered something else that had happened earlier in the day . . . the discovery he had made as he had struck the lintel . . . he was still growing.

Yes, he was still growing, and in another year he would perhaps have added some further six inches to his height. And he would be no stronger but rather weaker: it would then be as much as he could do to walk. It would be easier than ever for the boys to mock him with impunity. Oh, life was bitter, life was bitter: let him die.

He lay at the foot of a great oak which seemed to him to-day to deride him by its power to grow strong as it grew up. It was a tree and he was a weed. The giant lay stretched upon his back, his eyes staring from his moon-like face, his great teeth grinding involuntarily as a wave of misery swept over him. It seemed to him in the midst of his wretchedness that he was made a mockery even by the things he loved. The oak must know that he was a cumberer of the earth. The birds must have discovered

that there was nothing that a giant could do except be a scarecrow.

It was at this moment that the giant glanced up and saw that a man was quietly looking down upon him. He instantly recognised the man as the thin dark man who had stared at him so hard as he had come out of the lawyer's office.

The giant, trying to return the other's scrutiny, saw that he was tall—as ordinary men went—with black side whiskers and a small mouth of great authority. He was by way of being a dandy, and the fact that he wore three rings as well as a gold breast-pin and a heavy gold curb watch-chain did not offend the taste of the giant, who saw in these things the evidence rather of wealth and station. But it was not these purely material attributes which impressed and indeed disturbed Daniel, but the unrelenting scrutiny of his own person maintained by that pair of dark, secretive eyes. They were extraordinarily powerful eyes, but seemed deliberately to shroud some of their power behind the black bushy eyebrows. They were less inhuman eyes than non-human. Daniel wished the man would speak, for he felt absurd lying there and consenting to this scrutiny. But for a further minute the man considered him before he spoke.

"Well, young man——"

"Well," answered Daniel uneasily. He did not see why he should get up, but he found himself altering his position while yet he answered.

"I want a word with you."

He wanted to say, "I'm listening if you've anything to tell me," but he found that instead of saying that, he moved himself into a sitting posture and murmured, "Yes, sir."

"I'm looking for a young man."

Suddenly Daniel clambered in his ungainly way to his shaky feet. "Do you mean, sir?" he cried, his natural uneasiness in this man's presence conquered by the new thought in his mind; "do you mean that you want *me* to do some work?"

I want," repeated the man, who no longer looked down at Daniel but up, but who still retained his air of complete mastery of the situation, " I want a young man." He paused. " A tall young man."

" I'm——" began Daniel.

" A very tall young man," pursued the stranger.

" Ain't I that, sir? Won't I do? "

" In fact, a giant," concluded the man, still scrutinising Daniel and, as it seemed, trying to estimate his height.

" Ain't I—ain't I—a giant, sir? I mean——"

" You mean, aren't you a giant such as I am looking for? I do not know. Everything would depend. How old are you? "

" I'm in me twenty. I'll be going twenty-one soon though," answered Daniel.

" Oh, well, I daresay you'd grow."

" Grow? " cried Daniel, suddenly forgetting the new circumstances in which he seemed to be becoming involved. " I don't expect I will. I hope I won't. The doctor say there wore just a hope that I'd stop now."

" Ah," cried the man, " that sounds hopeful. Just a chance. All the other chances are in favour of your growing. Good. Very good."

" Good? Good, sir? You don't know——" He was almost involved in a confession of his miseries when he pulled himself up. Too lightly did he wear his heart on his sleeve.

" I say good. And I mean good. And I *do* know."

" But I thought you wanted to employ me, sir? "

" I do."

" Then if I wore to grow taller I'd be less o' use than I be now. Even as things are it do be as much as I——" But again he stopped. Why should he confess his weakness when he was on the point perhaps of getting a job? Let this strange employer find out afterwards, since at least he was aware that he might go on growing.

" If you went on growing," said the employer, " I'd even consider raising your wages. My last young man but one got five bob a week extra when he'd topped seven feet

six. Of course he was worth it then. But I'd be quite willing to pay you by the foot so to speak. That is, your pay would grow with your body."

"But I can't understand what you mean, sir. You see everybody else have said that I'm too big for a farm——"

"But I don't want you on a farm."

"Then what, sir, did you want me for?"

"For a show, of course."

A tremor seized Daniel so that he staggered and had to put out a hand towards the oak. His face was flaming—flaming with shame, and his mouth opened and closed as if he wanted to speak and could not find the words. For it had come to this—that his height now need only increase a little for him to be a freak, a spectacle, a thing for men and women to gape at. He was rejected from the human family and pushed behind the bars of a cage. He was a thing in a menagerie.

"No, sir," he cried at last. "No. I'd—I'd cut my throat rather. No, no——" His horror had swallowed up the nervous respect with which at first he had received the man's advances. "I'd—I'd rather die."

"But you won't do that," continued the man calmly, and in no way abashed. "You'll live on. And three pounds a week and all found isn't to be sneezed at."

"What!" cried Daniel, interrupted in the mid career of his new sense of humiliation by the startling wonder of that simple hint. "You pay *that!*"

"Why yes, certainly. My exhibits are the best out of London. I can afford to pay. I don't mind owning it. And as I've told you, the pay is increased with the length, just as my fat woman increases her pay per week with her weight. Threepence per pound is what I pay her, and I've seen her salary increase by as much as twenty pounds per annum since she's been with me. My living skeleton I pay by the weight he loses, though there is a clause in the agreement that payment ceases if he reduces his weight to the point that he can no longer retain life. That, of course, keeps him careful."

It is probable that the showman gave to his speech this

ironical, whimsical flavour from long habit; but when communicated to the ingenuous intelligence of his present listener his talk of his "exhibits" was likely to be accepted without qualification.

"But I couldn't do it—couldn't. I'd rather——"

"You'd rather," said the man coldly, "be made a fool of by people who haven't the eye to see that a giant is one of the most valuable exhibits which Nature has to offer. You'd rather be shouted at and run after by boys——"

Daniel flushed and knew that by some means this man had witnessed the scene of the day before.

"You'd rather sponge on your mother, though you could keep her as well as yourself in comfort, and nobody hereabouts any the wiser till you were settled in."

"Do you mean that last?"

"Why, of course I mean it. If I took you round we'd not be in these parts for months, and we'd never be in your own village, seeing we don't touch villages. We're high class—we only go to the towns. Liverpool—Manchester—Birmingham. So nobody'd need know, anyhow till you were in these parts. Your own mother needn't know till then. You could say you were employed as a clerk to sell tickets."

"But I *couldn't*—couldn't do it. No, sir, that I couldn't," cried Daniel in the agony of his soul.

"And you'd rather," went on the showman relentlessly, "you'd rather go on, as I've said, living on your poor mother. For I'll bet that's what you're doing now."

"I don't know what you know about me or my mother," answered Daniel quickly. "That bain't your affair what I do with my mother."

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Why, certainly. Of course if you like to live on her, to let her bend her back until she dies of the strain of keeping her big, idle, good-for-nothing of a son, it isn't for me to say. I've done my part when I've come to that son and pointed out to him a way by which he can save her, earn an honest living in a pleasant way—for my exhibits have a real good time, and when they're not on duty they can amuse them-

selves as they like, all except that the living skeleton mustn't go to inns and eat fattening foods——" He paused.

"However," he continued with another shrug, "if you've a mind to live on your mother instead of earning three pounds a week to start and all found in an honourable situation, well and good. I won't waste my time any more. But before I go, and in case you'd like to change your mind any time, this is my card. We tour the country, but I've this address in London which will always find me. And now good-day, to you, young man."

A moment later his feet could be heard rustling the year-old, dead leaves and then smiting sharply the road beyond.

He was gone.

III

For a moment Daniel stood reacting to the extraordinary onslaught which had been made upon him by the sheer force of the showman's personality. He still held the card in his hand, but he did not look at it. He looked before him to the place where the showman had disappeared beyond the trees, as if by disappearing there the stranger had made a hole in some other dimension and no longer moved in a world conditioned as that in which the giant lived.

For Daniel was sick with shame—sick as he had never been sick before. Not Robert Lanes himself, in all his mean petty persecutions, had accomplished what this man had done in that brief fifteen-minute colloquy. Until to-day he had succeeded, if lately only at intervals, in convincing himself that his idea that he was different from other people was largely the result of his own imagination quickened by the impertinences of a few small boys.

But now there could no longer be any doubt. He was not merely a man overgrown, a rather too noticeable figure in the High Street or wherever else he went; he was a Freak.

Had not the showman told him as much? Had he not spoken of the others: the fat woman, the living skeleton

and the like? And he—Daniel—was to be even as they; was to be gaped at by anyone who chose to pay for admission; even by such as Robert Lanes!

It was degrading; it was horrible; it was unbearable. Death—death must surely, surely come now!—if only to rescue him from such a humiliation as no man before was ever asked to undergo.

That showman——

The giant had begun to move out of the wood when he remembered the card in his hand. Dully he stared at it and read:

J. T. Chicknick,
Chicknick's World's Best Exhibition,
25 Duke Street, Adelphi,
London.

CHAPTER IV

I

THE giant went, heavy-eyed and leaden-footed, back to his mother's cottage. He hoped passionately that she would not ask him any questions, for a lie was a thing he had never been able to utter. But, as he consoled himself, happily she had no notion of his intent that morning when he had set out to storm the offices of the professions, and no idea of his discontent with his present work in the garden. And therefore, should she read in his face anxiety or trouble, she would not associate it with his failure. And certainly she could have no idea of the preposterous offer which had come to him in the wood.

Upon that offer his mind now dwelt with cruel persistence. Yet each time he protested that he could not accept it. It was not reasonable to expect him to do so. He found himself constantly crying out, as though into the ear of some moral authority which as constantly enjoined consideration for his mother.

In his first determination, however, not to tell his mother he found himself at last wavering. It would grieve her, even force her to partake a little in his humiliation. But knowing how impossible acceptance of such an offer must seem to her, he felt tempted to speak. It would be a great thing to have her support, for after all it was the thought that, by refusing, he robbed her of comfort, which was the chief source of his distress. If she were told about the offer she would repudiate it, and in doing so would free him from his present uneasy conviction that he had failed in his duty to her. . . .

At last he entered ready to speak, to confess. His mother had been stooping more laboriously than ever, and when she

looked up—came up, as she said, for a blow—his newly acute senses were shocked to see how pale and weary she looked. But to-day, perhaps because his perceptions had been sharpened, it seemed to him that he made a new discovery in his mother's face. He had grown accustomed to seeing her weary and pale to sickness; but what he read in her face to-day was a sort of spiritless air, as if the struggle, so long and so bravely maintained, was at last becoming too much for her.

"You're working too hard," he said, and listened to his own voice with a dreadful detachment as though he listened to the voice of a traitor.

"It's no good a-talkin' loike that," she answered with one of her rare shows of impatience. "Work's got to be done."

"There moight be something I could do more to save you."

"What could you do?" she demanded with a bleak irony.

She had no intention, he knew, of pointing the fact always present in his consciousness, and at another time the words would not have affected him as they did to-day.

"I was wonderin'," he answered. "That's all."

"There's nawthen, son, that you could do. Nawthen. You can't sew. When I give you that seam you know what happened."

He laughed unreasonably loud in his nervous way at this, for it was one of their few jests. She herself spoke too wearily to-day for it to be expected of her that she would laugh too.

"No," he said, "no, there bain't nawthen that I could do of *that* kind."

"Then what kind of work were you thinking of? For *I* don't know of anything, and we can't expect a man to come along and *offer* work—put it under your nose so to speak."

He started and stared at her. Was it possible that the showman had called on her before following him; that she knew all the time? But he satisfied himself at once that that was not the case.

She did not know.

"No, we can't expect anyone to thrust work, I see that, mother. But sometimes something 'll tarn up——"

"No, Dan'l. Things don't turn up."

He stood there meaning to answer her, for now, surely, was his chance. And the words would not come. How could he admit the truth? How could he subject himself to the humiliation of admitting himself a freak? Even in the ear of the woman who had borne him he could not do that. He turned away and moved to the door.

"Well, my mother, you're mostly roight. I'd best get on wi' the garden, since I'm not to expect another job," and he went at once.

But as he took his hoe and then, at the garden-end, removed his coat, he tasted in anticipation the distress that must now be his whenever he caught a glimpse of his mother's lined and weary face. He could help her, and he had refused to do so.

II

Mabel Hathage stood behind the counter with fingers laced behind her shapely neck to make a head-rest. In her pale print dress with the sleeves rolled off the arms to the elbow, she made a small figure of young beauty inviting the curiosity of an admiring world. Opposite to her and contrasting with her perfect white-and-pinkness and her tender contours stood a narrow-bodied, sallow young woman with active brown eyes and an inquisitive nose.

"Oh, my dear," Mabel cried, "but you really never saw! Oh, Jinnie, he were right in the middle of them all and them all too clever and quick—the young varmints! He couldn't do nawthen. He just look about loike a deer in the middle of dogs, only *he* don't look loike a deer."

"He wore *your* dear!" came sharply from the giggling Jinnie.

"*My* dear indeed! I loike that. Him! A rale ungain one he are. And if he come putting his big silly face in here and pest'rin' me I'll send him off sharp enough. I might let a man—but not that thing. . . . Yes, men——"

as if she were considering bright possibilities, "men—of course—I mean the rale men; they're all the same." Her manner, as much as her words, implied a challenge and a comment on the competence of the other to achieve to so complete a knowledge as herself of the opposite sex. For what could plain Jinnie know of men? In return, without friendship, Jinnie eyed her friend, sickened with envy of the white skin and delicate contours.

"But what was the end of Dan'l Windmill?"

"Why, he ran at them and they upset him, and down he go and knock over the milk! I never laughed so much in all moi loife! You never saw the soight he looked. Down he go and all the milk everywhere! And he cut himself and was all blood and milk! But that warn't the funniest thing. The funniest thing was to see him runnin' home with all the boys after him and running loike——"

"A deer," suggested Jinnie, adding with sharp malice—"*your* dear——"

"You call that dazzy fule my dear again!"

"Then it be Tom Rossmore!"

The blood rose suddenly in Mabel's cheek and she looked down. "Who have been talking about *him?* I never said I seen anything in Tom Rossmore."

"Never said?" challenged Jinnie. "Ah, you never said——"

"No, nor meant. Tom Rossmore—he are nawthen to me." And now she looked up boldly to meet the challenge. "I don't see anythin' in him."

"*I'd* call him a fine figure of a man," said Jinnie softly, slowly, and half-judicially, with her gaze cast into space as if she had summoned from the invisible a picture of the person spoken of. "A foine soldier-like fellow I'd call him. I'd be proud to see a man loike that knockin' at the door of mine——"

But Mabel perfectly recognised a manœuvre to procure confession.

"Yes, a man I'd loike to be seen walkin' out with."

"Then," said Mabel, a little viciously, "I'd go walkin' out with him if I wore you."

Jinnie giggled again shrilly, but there was a darkness in her aspect, for she had not missed the taunt. "Oh, I believe in keepin' myself *to* myself."

"And you just said you'd loike to be seen out with him."

"I were thinking and meaning if I was you."

"But it happen," answered Mabel, with much of cold dignity, "that I don't want any such silly goat. *I* believe in keepin' myself to myself. And you've no call to go puttin' any name alongside o' mine. I've had enough o' men. I'm not loike some that never have had the chance of going out with a bor and keep talking about men all day long."

"Oh, but you won't disappoint your big boy." Jinnie began to feel that her spiritual cuticle was being worn away, and she was careless now if she irritated.

"Disappoint him? If you mean I'd be seen with that long-legged, big silly——" She paused, and seemed to reflect. Then she smiled in the face of the angry Jinnie. Really poor Jinnie was to be pitied. There was not any need to answer feeling with feeling. Such seemed to be the thought passing through her mind: such certainly was what Jinnie, further now than ever from appeasement, read in the smiling eyes and in the little mouth with its air of recovered tolerance.

"I'm not sayin' though that I couldn't bear to have a bit o' fun even with a big silly giant. What a girl want is to see differences. . . . And *he's* different."

"Oh, I believe you're half smitten," teased Jinnie, inimical still.

"Smitten? With that—that weed? You take it from me, young woman; I loike my fun when I can get it, and if I can get it here, well—I'll take it. But—smitten! With that simple! His breath do be enough to turn you sick. *You* never felt his face near yours, his head all like a rare ole dag, nor yet his great big hand like a puddin' all hot—no, don't talk to me——"

"And you're only after him for the difference he make. Yes, I suppose you'd feel loike that—we 'ud all. If you'd

had a black beard always coming into your faace you'd loike something smooth. Yes, I can see that." She only half admitted the empirical quality of her understanding of these conditions. "You'd never be content with one—you'd never"—she watched carefully, knowing that she probed—"you'd never see a man and know that if he'd have you, you'd be his woman for ever and ever."

"I don't say I'd never do that," said Mabel. And certainly Jinnie had the pleasure of reading a confession.

"Yes, well, but if you might some time see a man loike that—you not seen him yet——"

"I don't say——" But she seemed to grow afraid that she had told something. "Oh, you and your questions!" she cried shrilly, and with no attempt to recapture her earlier manner. "You're plaguin' me." And the colour that she tried to fight down still betrayed. "You're roight though. There's never a man that would trouble me. But I do loike a change. I loiked a boy once because he'd lost an eye and he made me feel funny and frightened. He look so fierce. But I think naun of them loike that really."

"I believe you loike that long boy," said Jinnie stolidly.

"Loike him? What is there for me to loike except that he be everythin' that a girl *wouldn't* loike? He be out of shape, he have got a face that make you want to laugh, he can't talk loike a man, and it make me feel quite creepy sometimes just to have him near me."

"And yet," suggested Jinnie, "you loike——"

"Yes, I loike anything that be funny and horrid! There be some things to eat that be loike that. But you only loike them because they make you loike the other things—the things that are really noice, so much more than before. That be loike going out into the sleet and then coming in to a big warm fire. I'm shivering with a heap of horrors all the toime that big silly weed are hanging over me."

"Your mind's a rale tittermatorter—up and then down."

"Everybody don't understand. Because woi? because—well, there's some girls that meet nobody. If a girl have a lot of boys that she know, well—she know what I mean."

Under the sallow skin the blood rose in Jinnie's cheek.

There was no mistaking the implied reflection on her attractions. But while a sharp word trembled on her thin lips, the door of the shop opened, and Jane Packard, the grocer's general servant, stood there with a jug in her hand. As this young woman was not admitted to the confidence of these, her superiors; and as Jinnie was not sorry to be afforded an excuse to go, seeing that she had not yet been able to think of anything which really should wound her friend, she took the opportunity to run away, while Mabel, a little coldly, waited for the order of the new-comer.

III

Daniel's mind had been tortured by thoughts of his relation to his mother: he could save her and he would not stretch a hand. But not for long could he keep away the vision of Mabel. It broke in upon his thoughts, refusing to be denied: it drew him, guilty though he felt his surrender to be, and traitorous to his mother. For Mabel quite definitely involved a permanent refusal to do the thing which should save his mother. If he wanted Mabel he must give up the idea that he must go to Chicknick. No girl such as she would for a moment consider a freak. Well, he had no intention of being one. He was content now to declare that, and to surrender to his vision. He became the quiveringly happy lover, recalling her beauty and her law. She had told him that he was not to come to the shop any more. "But woi?" he had pleaded.

"Because I'm not going to have it said——"

She had paused and seemed unwilling to disclose what it was that she did not wish to have said. But Daniel had joyously filled in the gap as Love dictated. She had realised that his visits were not mere idle attentions: she knew in what she had allowed herself to be involved: other people, too, would realise that this was definitely an affair; and being other people they would naturally talk. Whereas it was her wish, she being a modest young girl, that for the present her romance should develop quietly.

He had not dreamed that she would so quickly have elevated their interest in one another into an affair of passion: that she would have turned this delicate and impossible dream of his into a firm and lively reality. But she had chosen to do so, and it was his part to accept the gift and to rejoice.

He thus found a new, subtle delight in her prohibition; even in her seeming coldnesses. Maidens were like that—very easy when their hearts were not bestowed, diffident and difficult where they loved. He had grown strangely wise, had the poor giant, in affairs of the heart during these last few days.

And her refusal to have him haunting the High Street had this enormous advantage, that she could not then see him exposed to petty humiliations. He had convinced himself that even if ever, by ill luck, she should see him thus exposed, her relation to himself would remain unaffected.

But he was glad that she could go on thinking of him as a fine tall figure of a fellow, ready to stand beside her and defend her and be her man.

He had been to the shop on three successive days before she had told him that he must not come again.

"Then how can I see you?" he had demanded, looking down upon her round softness from his great silly height.

"Who said you were to see me?" she demanded.

"Well, you said you'd come—you said you'd let me take you out for a walk one day and that you'd let me see you home to Stowe."

"What if I did? That don't be sayin' I'll have you here."

"Then will you let me see you outside the village? Will you come into the lanes and down them pretty little lokes to the fields, as I've wanted you to? there bain't never anybody there. Could you come that way one evenin' when you've finished work?"

"Well," with a toss of the small pretty head, "I might do that. If I don't mistake you for one of the trees, you do be that high, I'd never be sure. I'll look to see you there one noight soon. Perhaps to-morrow noight."

He felt something move within him : he had not, perhaps, known how vivid his passion had become. If she looked into his face at that moment she must have felt the impact of a rapture sharpened by his having, for so long, held himself away from women. For with his fears of ridicule and shame he had never dared to do other than go straight forward without casting eye to right or left.

"Then I'll be there. I'll be there every night waitin'. And you'll come?"

She stood behind her counter looking up at him steadily, and, as it might have seemed, measuringly.

"You do go *up*," she said suddenly.

He flushed unhappily, trying to read her mood. "Yes, I know I do. Do you loike me the less for that?"

"There—go away," she said, laughing. "Who said I loiked you at all?"

And he had gone, and gone satisfied. He was puzzled by her easily assumed indifference—and delighted. For, as he believed, women deal in contradictions. The giant was beginning to take himself seriously as a student of women.

And his mind, that had been troubled about his mother, went on feeding on thoughts of Mabel, feeding with guilty delight.

How exquisite were these contradictions of hers. Hearts were strange things when you came close enough to look into them, and he would only be fearful now if she showed herself too tender. For women were so gentle that they must be passing soft only to whom they must deny. Their hearts were that yielding! And so only where there was need to pity did they bestow a showy kindness. On the other hand, when they meant to give much, or to give all, they, most naturally, were a little hesitant and cold. Yes, most naturally, for was it not true that a woman gave all; while a man took all, and gave back very little?

What right, for instance, had he, clumsy and unlovely and coarsely made, to receive the sum of that white, soft beauty of hers; to allow his eye to visit her, while he told himself that here was a gift given him by her with no demand

of him in return, save a little tolerance of a pretended coldness? He was a wise man, declared the giant to himself, wise in that ultimate wisdom—the wisdom of women's hearts.

But his present happiness in these reflections suffered new assaults. Superimposed upon that vision of Mabel was a face lined and weary—the face of a woman whose hair alone kept its colour of youth, and who, as she seemed sadly to meet his eye, looked prematurely aged, as if stooping down towards the grave.

CHAPTER V

YET Daniel would not, for long, submit to that burden of reproach. His young heart cried for youth and beauty. He must go to Mabel. She had promised to meet him some Monday. And he had hovered upon the edge of the trees all that same night, though with no expectation of seeing her. She would certainly not come the first time. His newly-learnt woman-lore taught him that. Upon the second day, shyly reluctant, perhaps : upon the third more likely.

It was upon the second day that the giant had formed his scheme to improve his economic position : it was upon that day that he had learnt the lesson of his own complete inconsequence ; and it was upon that day he had tasted the final humiliation of being numbered with the freaks.

But there was this to add : it was on that day that he had received the offer which must now condition his relation to his mother, and not only to his mother but indirectly to his love herself.

He had agreed with Mabel that their meeting should be upon the edge of the wood that was reached by a wide green lane or "loke," and now he could have wished that the scene of the tryst had been anywhere else ! For now there was always present in the giant's mind the absurd possibility that at any time, between the trees, standing coolly and watching, there might appear a tall dark man with three rings on his fingers and a glittering breast-pin ; a man who spoke quietly and with deadly effectiveness, and who had an offer that, properly viewed, should at once shatter a giant's love-dream and forbid his hopes.

But Daniel, while thus torn with thoughts about his mother, was haunted, too, by a question of sheer terror.

Suppose the knowledge of his humiliation should reach the ear of Mabel? Suppose she learnt that her lover was regarded in other circles as a very promising freak, how could he hope to retain her liking, even her tolerance? With much pondering he had convinced himself that to accept Mr. Chicknick's offer was not only to surrender the last rag of self-respect, but to surrender Mabel. There was indecency in the suggestion that a girl could smile upon a man stigmatised as the showman wished to stigmatise him.

Uneasily he assured himself there was no real need for alarm: it was unlikely that Chicknick would again appear in Oldborne. It was not as if he had been exhibiting there. He must only have been passing through and discovered the possible new exhibit by a cruel accident. Why he should have come there at all if he had not heard of there being a local giant, Daniel did not sit down to consider.

But as he moved about the wood, haunting the trees, where he had seen the dark showman, he was deeply troubled, and for another reason than merely a memory of Chicknick. He was disturbed by a sick dream of Mabel. He had already waited for her two nights. On the first night, and again on the second, he had been the less troubled, because he had not really expected to see her—his woman-lore having warned him that she would not come.

But on this third night his heart, moved with young, hungry passion, waited in a tremor. It was a night of heaviness—a louring troubled sky that promised rain: once or twice came the sound, very remote as yet, of thunder. The thick leaves of the trees were perilously still, as if keeping a secret: he watched a single leaf of the ash that sheltered him, watched it for a full minute until he had endowed it with personality; and it did not move, nor even quiver. He looked at it, excited by his discovery of its perfection. He examined its velvety green surface, and then turned it over to see its white reverse. He was palpitatingly conscious of its beauty, and wondered if Mabel could share his consciousness. There would, perhaps, be some things that he could teach her. He looked up at the sky

and was extraordinarily impressed by the idea that something was in suspense, something of which a storm was a mere outward seeming. He grew uneasy. It seemed as if the whole world might be involved, and that the leaf that depended unmoving on its slender yellow-brown stalk growing from the main bough was, in its dreadful immobility, a symbol of a universe that waited and held its breath.

He began to wish that she might not come, lest her coming became a movement challenging the law of waiting silence which seemed to be imposed.

A moment later he saw her coming, a white, soft figure, and making by her motion, as it now seemed to him, a music through the happily fluttered air. For no air, however pledged to maintain a dead quiet, could mind being parted by such a form as hers, he whispered to his silly heart: no dead leaf lying there immovable upon the floor of this wood and waiting to be made one again with its common substance could be troubled by her light foot.

He came forward flushed, drawing a long breath, his eyes soft and full: for a moment hesitating while he asked himself how a maiden would like to be greeted. But that perplexity was momentary only. He had found his words in the simple miracle that was accomplished in her coming at all.

"It seem won'erful," he began stepping towards her. But she gave back a little rather sharply, her gaze, as it appeared, upon the crown of his head.

"Woi! you're like a tree yourself," she cried.

He flushed quickly, frowned, bent his gaze upon her with swift, anxious scrutiny.

"You mean——" and the sudden pain in his heart spoke. "You're sorry—I mean that you moind——"

"Moind?" she cried lightly, perhaps wilfully misunderstanding. "Moind? Why should I moind? What have I to moind about?"

Quickly, as once before, his face cleared, and he reverted to his woman-lore. She needs must depreciate, or pretend to do so. She must pay him out for taking all.

"Shall we walk through here?" he said, and took her arm.

She let him guide her into the deeper silence among the trees before she answered him with half-closed eyes.

"You are the guide," she said.

"My dear!" he began, hesitating, and then suddenly tightening his hold. And again, "My dear." (Perhaps she remembered Jinnie, "*Your* dear!")

It was a miracle that he should be handling that soft arm, feeling its perfection. He pulled the sleeve from her white wrist, so that his fingers might touch the velvety skin. All his senses were afire; sometimes he could not speak; and so that pair moved on over the springy turf. The heavy brooding air seemed only to make more tense his yearning passion for her. But words would not come. Suddenly he was made fearful of a suspicion: was she comparing his love-making with others she had known? From the suspicion he flew to hatred of possible precursors. And so he was driven to speak.

"I suppose I'm not the first man that have been out with you loike this?" He tried to laugh. He had a notion that this kind of challenge was usual, and generally pleased, provided that it were not spoken too heavily. But his face was filled with nervous suspicion as he felt her little figure grow taut on his arm.

"The first? No!—and if you don't brighten up you won't be the last neither."

Oh, what a fool he seemed to be! "I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything. You see, when a man care as much as I care——"

"And *do* you care?" She had grown soft again and her voice came to him cooingly.

"Care?" he cried, like one rejoicing to be liberated. "I've cared from the first minute I saw you crossing the street and making it all shinin' and beautiful-loike."

She was drawing deep breaths now, and looking down. Here was incense, and she breathed it. "Go on," she said, using now the thick speech he had heard once before.

"I never saw aught like you. You took my breath away, you blinded my eyes so that when I looked into that street I couldn't see anything but something shinin', and when I

went to that place where you wore you wore too beautiful to be believed. Your face made a music in me. Yes, a music. It was loike that. And I felt all holy-loike, and yet, if you know what I mean, but as if there was something sacred about you. You seemed too good——"

"Yes, but," and if there was a slight impatience suddenly he did not hear nor notice it, "but what did you think I looked loike? What did you loike about me most——"

He drew a deep breath; and a little laugh that was clear and spontaneous broke from him as if he loved a challenge he could not answer.

"What did I loike? Oh, my liddle love, how can I say? It wore *all* of you. Your hair shining like a glory, and your eyes that were loike starshine, and your shape that seemed to flow like a waterfall and your beautiful-like hands that I saw looking so white against the black counter. How can I tell you what I loiked the best?"

"Well, you've told me quite noicely for a great length of a feller that one mightn't think had a tongue in his head sometimes."

"It aren't always that I seem to find the words," said the giant a little ingenuously—perhaps too ingenuously. For no reason that he could understand he became aware of a slight tightening of the delicately spun muscles under his hand. He sought a diversion.

"Could you settle down there and let me sit agin you for a few minutes?"

They had come to a little clearing, and she waited passively while he chose the spot.

"Poof—it's won'erful hot," she cried, and then, as if the air had caught her with some subtle form of oppression, "It feel as if somethin' wore a-goin' to bust."

He looked at her for a moment in uncertainty. Then he pointed to the seat he had selected.

"There," he said diffidently. "You sit down here."

A little constrainedly she sank down and he flung himself beside her. Then he remembered something, and rearranged his position.

Finally he sank back content.

Within five days had this miracle been possible. For a few minutes he was happy not to speak. In this tense air he was made almost too acutely aware of himself. It was as though, in the silence, he could feel the universe pulsating with his passion. The whole world throbbed. And yet in this invisible air there were sounds that were made doubly poignant by the general background of quiet. Somewhere in the sky outside a lark confessed its love; while from a thicket there came the sound of some great and intensive business in a life unseen of men.

He lay with his knees curled up. It was an odd attitude with a suggestion of being contrived, and her eye presently seemed to dwell on it.

"You've stretched out in a funny way. That don't fare to look natural—why do you——"

Daniel's big face expressed a sudden disturbance, and, caught in confusion, he blurted out:

"I—I did not want you to be noticin' all the toime that I am so silly long in the leg."

"Yes," she said without kindness, "you do be a rale oddity," and she laughed lightly.

His face, touched with pain, was averted; but he said no more, lying still. Presently he seemed to listen: there were those mysterious movements of undiscovered and undiscoverable birds troubling the leaves and making the sound as of a traffic in some other world.

It was a sound he loved, with its curious intimate hints of the reality and passion and continuity of life.

"That never fare to stop," he said. He had not meant to speak.

"What?" she asked idly, lying back and gazing up into the black, fretted canopy of interlaced tree-tops over her head.

"I mean that little chatter of the birdies."

"The birdies!" she half snorted. And he understood. She thought it was a childish term; and he was glad to be reminded when he was in danger of failing to show manhood.

"I called them that," he said, not pretending he had not understood why she had shown disdain, "because they

somehow make you feel soft to them. But I daresay it are silly. 'Birds' are what I should say. They make that chatter, never stoppin' for us unless they're frightened enough to fly away."

"What sort o' birds are they?" she asked, still idly but deceiving him.

"Blackbirds—yellow-hammers—tits. I can't see, but I know they're there, even if I don't hear them sing. You get to know their way of movin'."

"You know an awful lot about birds, don't you?" This without any approval. He had been about to spring up in delight at her interest and, as it seemed, admiration of his knowledge, when he sank back. She did not think any more of him because of his bird-lore.

"You don't seem to care about my knowin' those sort o' things," he said, though very gently.

"Oh, I don't moind," she answered. "Why should I moind? It's very noice. Only why can't you be loike other men?"

A little tremor touched him. He hoped she did not see it. He had been about to say that these things were his hobby and that every man had a right to a hobby after his work. But he must not speak of his work. Indeed it had begun to strike him that a question which he had expected had not come. She asked nothing about his occupation. And yet the employment of a man in whom they took interest was a matter with which young women might legitimately occupy their minds. A moment's reflection convinced him that she did not trouble herself about *his* work because in this first rapturous moment of their common attachment she had no mind for such material matters. But apart from that she trusted him, as it was proper in a maiden to do. Was he not her man, and must she not leave it to him to do all that was right in relation to herself?

But now he reproached himself with a sudden and dreadful charge—he was doing little enough to deserve her trust. She asked no question; but should she do so, what reply could he offer but an evasion? Could he honestly talk of his "farm"? On the other hand, must he admit that all his

efforts to find employment had abjectly failed? . . . A voice speaking softly from some remote corner of his heart whispered a reminder and put its question: must he say that he had been offered a situation in which he could earn good money that would enable him to support his mother and perhaps to marry, but a situation the mere knowledge of the character of which must shame his mother and turn the eyes of all women away from him in contempt and aversion?

No, what he had been to his mother he must be to this innocent, trusting woman at his side: he must be silent. And in the meantime he must keep a sharp look-out lest a situation should offer for which he could believe himself competent.

Still, he would have liked her to be interested in his birds. Perhaps she noticed the silence into which he had fallen.

"You're not talkin'," she said. "You're not—tellin' me things."

Instantly his brow cleared again. Other men could tell her about birds: only *he* could tell her about the things she wished to hear. How blind he had been!

"Liddle love," he began, and she closed her eyes as she listened. "You look as if you might be a fairy here, loike somethin' beautiful out of these woods. You're all such a beautiful shape——" and his hand began gently to caress her arm.

Suddenly he stopped. Something other than the birds troubled the silence. His face grew pale, and the tremor that touched him must have communicated itself to her, for he saw her open her eyes and look at him in sharp curiosity.

"What's the matter wi' you?"

"Nawthen," but he whispered, and she noticed the dropped voice.

"Then why do you behave as if suffen *wore* the matter?"

"I don't"; but still he kept his voice low. She frowned and examined his face. He wanted to say, "Don't speak," but how could he? How could he explain, or how tell her that he, the biggest man in Oldborne, trembled in every limb because, from somewhere on the road outside, there

had come a cry that he knew to be that of the boys? If they found him there they would do the worst that it was in them to do. Like an army of evil they would swoop upon himself. Their loud ribaldries would echo in that place now sanctified by her presence; they would tear to tatters the garments of beauty that overhung this world of his; they would turn the lovely thing that had entered his life into something coarse, and small, and absurd. And what girl's love, just springing, could survive that? Some day, when Mabel and he knew one another, he might be able to tell her. She would then be on his side: they would be one. But it was not to be expected that the interest she had in him was strong enough yet to bear attack. Ah, if he could but gather the strength that should go with such a frame as his! Then would he be able to drive these boys before him, if ever they dared to come near, instead of cowering here and hoping that they would pass!

In the meantime he could feel that the girl was examining him with the first note of unfriendly curiosity. And again he told himself that he dare not attempt an explanation. To do so would be at once to earn her scorn.

But the voices grew fainter. The boys had passed. And so, for the moment, the danger, too, had disappeared. He drew a deep breath. He did not say "We may talk again." But his manner expressed that idea. And he plunged into speech, not alone to please her but to divert her attention.

"You're like the queen of this here place," he said, and put his hand upon her arm, so that his fingers touched the white skin. He did not know that he deliberately sought to recapture the thrill; and that, though his senses responded to the touch of her, they reacted still to the immense disturbance wrought by those strident voices, voices of an enemy force, that should have been things to laugh at, and that were, actually, invincible.

Even the stillness of this place, which before had vaguely oppressed him, but which with her coming had seemed to offer a fitting relief to the throaty sweetness of her voice, was now again infested with fears. He could not recover the

simple accent of passion, though the thing was there in his soul. He became not only physically, but even spiritually, inarticulate.

"Yes. You are beautiful lying there loike as if you wore on a throne."

Living so much to himself, and so reading here and there, he had a kind of rough harmony of speech; and there were times when he could find words to express his feelings; but skill was gone from him now.

Perhaps she noticed a loss; for she got up.

"I'll be going along home," she said. "It do be late." She spoke without any emotion, as if she was ending a commonplace talk, and not as though she had had part in a passionate interlude.

He paused and looked at her, troubled. For the change in her manner he alone was responsible. He had spoilt the evening. His brow grew black with the sudden anger of impotence. It was *not* he who had spoilt the evening. It was the boys who had done that. If some hand were suddenly stretched to touch them, so that they fell dead, he would not move a finger to restrain it. But he tried to keep up the illusion still—the illusion that there had been no interruption of their common mood.

". . . I'll always remember to-noight. The first noight you come with me——"

"And that 'll be the last——"

"What do you mean?" and he caught her arm. "You don't mean that?"

"Why no, you silly bor!" She had read his frantic anxiety, and after a pause had decided to relent. "No, I won't mean it if you'll remember next time that you're not to be so odd-loike."

"You'll come with me again?" His voice trembled foolishly.

"Yes. If you talk and tell me things——" She had let her voice thicken, and her eyes were upon the path before her. "We'll be out of the wood in a minute," she said slowly, and seemed to loiter. For a moment, in swift mad happiness, he looked at her, feeling for a meaning; and then

suddenly the giant, stooping, brought his lips to hers. He kissed full, sweetly, flushed with passion and joy: he kissed again. And then, drawing a deep breath, she put up a hand.

"I think that 'll do," she said, and laughed a little.

And so the pair came to the edge of the clearing.

"I'll say good-boye," she said quickly. "My way's this way."

"Am I not——?"

"To take me home? No. You've had enough to-noight. More than you deserve." She spoke lightly.

He acquiesced at once; and without another word she ran swiftly on to the roadway and set off towards what she called "mine," by which she meant the lodging at Laughter's farm, where she dwelt while she filled her temporary situation here in Oldborne.

Once she paused and, looking back, must have seen him standing there following her with his eyes. Whether she read what was in the heart of the giant is less sure; whether she knew that the man stood there, calling himself poltroon that he did not follow her, seeing in her pause an invitation to pursue and then letting her go; whether she knew that he had convicted himself of being glad that she had not explicitly permitted him to see her home, is very doubtful. Certainly she did not know (he considered the matter himself and assured himself that she did not know) that he dared not yet, lover though he was, accompany her into public ways, lest in doing so he should be seen by the boys or young men of Oldborne.

But he could not even alone go home as yet. He must first get some hold upon himself. And so he returned into the wood. This fear, that worked in his mind like a poison, must be driven out. If it were not, life could now not be endured. At the very moment when he had tasted the first great experience of his life, that moment when he had brought his lips down to hers, there must mingle, with a dramatic irony, the thought of his persecutors. Was there to be no relief? Other men went with their maids, and went with a feeling that their struggle was past: what they had

desired was now theirs: their hearts rested in their great joy. But he went in a great fear, and a fear that must increase as she grew dearer: the fear that at any moment his happiness might be snatched from him. For how could the love of any woman survive the discovery that the man she walked with was the laughing-stock of a village?

He went back to the trees and found the place where they had sat. A heavy hush was over all; the air was still tense and ominous. He flung himself down, and the sweetness of that spent hour swept over him again, filling him with a sick longing. Everything that had composed the scene and atmosphere seemed to proffer itself for this sweet and terrible re-experience, so that no dimmest shadow should be wanting, no faintest nostalgia sway. He saw with a tragic acuteness of vision the way two branches had interlaced themselves in a fir that had been visible from where he had been beside her, visible but only subconsciously visible then. A faint essence that had filled his happy nostrils, an obscurely contrived unity of some nearmost leafy smell and a distant bean-field came to him now, to be recognised with a kind of trembling terror; and the silence, before which all these things had had their being, seemed to have become visible, and to have entered into some new relation to the physical and super-physical facts with which it was involved, so that it reached remote senses and served to set off and relieve phenomena appealing to the scent-sense and to the eye. This curious, subtle inter-relation of the visible with the heard and scented was no new experience, though usually it reached him through the channel of intuition, and more often than not was suggested by those vague nostalgias. But to-night he was vitally, and even fearfully, aware of life presented to him at its most poignant and passionate moment. Every impression charmed and tortured him. He was in an agony of joy and tears, of humiliation and triumph.

In a life with her alone, where love only ruled, he could have played King to her Queen. But in life, as he must live it, he could be no more than a sorry pawn. He panted for her with love's sick and futile passion; he tried to scent again the fragrance of her young presence; to touch the

softness of her arms; to feel her body lean towards him: he tried again to experience the stark and unassailable happiness of being shut in under this canopy of trees with her. She had been his. And she might never be his again. Life taunted him so that he was convulsed with a pain that he manifested as all unconsciously his long bony fingers sought to pluck the very earth, to drag at the roots of the trees that gave him shelter, until his nails were black with soil.

He knew not what impulse removed him from that spot at last, nor how he stumbled homewards. But he got home at last, only to lie upon his back in his narrow white-washed bedroom under the sloping roof; lie there and react to the passion and agony and suspense of a sweet and fearful hour, until sleep at last came to ease his sick and happy heart.

In the morning he went, early, to his work in the garden. And only then did it occur to him that from the moment Mabel had come to him in the wood until now, he had not remembered the offer of the showman; that not till now had he recollected his duty to his mother.

CHAPTER VI

I

DANIEL stood on his little patch of earth. Beside his feet were his lines of vegetables that gave so indifferent a return. Under the wall, twenty yards away, stood his one small fowl-house, which brought him such money as he was able to contribute to the upkeep of the house. The giant should have been working, but for some little time now he had stood idle, hoe in hand, looking across to where a skinny white hen pecked the last remains of the morning fling of meal.

Daniel was caught up by an idea. It was an idea that once or twice before had played in his mind. But to-day he yielded it a profound attention. For within a week two events of immense importance had happened—one, a thing supremely horrible to remember, the visit and the offer of the showman; the other a thing that rang every bell in his heart—Mabel Hathage's coming to him.

But he found now that this idea, which he had allowed to occupy his mind, was something to be examined and considered quite strictly in relation to both these new, supreme facts of his experience.

Like a revelation it came to him that this poor business of his, which was signified in the pair of shrivelled birds, must be a poor business no longer. It must be generously expanded. He had often wondered vaguely whether such a thing could not be possible; and he had then let the idea subside. But the series of experiences, beginning with his conviction that he did not earn enough to relieve his mother, followed by his failure to find employment with either the lawyer or the surveyor; the hideously humiliating offer of the showman; and finally the coming of Mabel

whom, if he was to marry, he must support, convinced him that he must get to work at once.

To-day the special idea which kept him standing, seemingly idle, hoe in hand, was the realisation that it was the hen-house which brought in such money as he earned : the kitchen garden scarcely paid for itself.

When he had thought for some moments he retreated to the house.

" Mother ! " She looked up, stretching her arms a little to relieve them, and then settled back in her chair ; perhaps not sorry to have an excuse for pause. (For she was a woman with merciless suspicions of herself, and harried herself on, when the inevitable demand of her senses for rest made itself felt.)

The giant, observing her, noticed again how increasingly pale she was : how puckered about the eyebrows ; how drooping the figure. But in the sudden exuberance of his ambition he had no space for sorrow ; nor would he see the figure of Mabel opposed to his mother's. He was going to rescue her.

" Mother. Look here. I've been a-thinkin'. I've been a-thinkin' about all that 'ere work I'm a-doin' of outside."

" Well," she said without enthusiasm, in her tired treble.

" That's rare poor work," he continued, " that it are. Never brought me nawthen."

" It's *that* you're after again ? Somethin' else, eh ? "

" Well, yes and no. It do be loike this. I do a lot with the vege'bles, but that don't fare to help much. But the birds for their number don't do so bad. Now, if I wore to go into *that* a bit more and turn the whole place into poultry, say them new Cochin Chinas, I'd some day be a made man."

" You'd want money to do that, my son."

" Yes. I know that's roight. But I might be able to borrow something. I'd not want a very big lot. I'd want some, of course, to set up proper. But I know the ways of it —which be more'n some folk do ; and if I could borrow——"

That must have been the first talk about this prodigious scheme. It took possession of the mind of this tall young

man, as still more grandiose conceptions have conquered the imaginations of fellow-dreamers. With every moment that he contemplated it he beheld it grow. First his eager eye saw this bald and meagre holding magically transformed, so that everywhere there rose new wired-in runs. Then there were the fowls. These would be of such a quality as to set the landladies over at Stowe eager to have them at his own price; and, of course, when they bought their poultry from him they would buy their eggs as well. He'd not mind if they teased him a little about his size: he'd forgive them even if they pointed him out to their visitors as the biggest lad in the country. But that wouldn't be to insult him. And with their increasing demands would come the need for a correspondingly increasing stock, accompanied by a necessity for a greater accommodation. And so this visionary of a giant saw the wall between his garden and the field beyond falling down and the field his. He saw it covered with poultry runs and a man working under him, perhaps even two. Men might even come to him suing for work. At that thought he exulted; and he remembered his own defeats, so that he might anticipate the taste of giving what had been refused to himself. It might even happen, sooner or later, that some of his persecutors themselves, looking for work, would come to him, very civil in their attitude. Life would indeed have its recompenses if Robert Lanes should arrive at his door calling him "Sir!"

And finally, when he was a master with a flourishing trade, and money coming in, and his mother in a white lace cap making tea and selling her "connection"—there being no further use for it—he'd go to Mabel Hathage. "I didn't tell you much about my own affairs, or that I'm in business for myself. You trusted me. But I didn't abuse your trust. I'm the best-known poultry farmer in Oldborne; I've good money coming in, and I'm extending to the second field. And there's that Bob Lanes has asked me to give him a trial; and I'm inclined to do so, as I'm wanting a fourth hand now that I've to keep a horse and trap to get my stuff over to Stowe. I'm thinking of a dairy too, but before I set that afoot I'll ask you to come in as partner."

It would be such a lot of fun to talk to her like that, all in a pretence of business. And he'd finish up, "Will you come? Are you ready?" knowing what her answer would be. And she'd say, "I've always been ready," and he'd take her and show her all that he had done. And he'd not be the weed that he was now, but with all the money he made he'd buy himself food, and grow strong and fat, and be a great figure of a man, and she'd be afraid to speak to him for his strength and bigness, and so would all hereabouts. And one day a showman with a dark face would meet him and say, "I suppose you haven't changed your mind about a certain offer?" and he'd say, "If I hear another word about a certain offer I'll carry you in my arms all the way to Stowe, all the six miles to Stowe, and then throw you into the sea there. . . ."

II

Business men before and since have had their visions, have seen great things rise from small. And they have begun by searching, sometimes with nose very near to earth, for that modicum of capital which must be the foundation. As to the raising of capital the giant thought much. At dinner he gave his thoughts speech, and was immediately struck by his mother's tone and attitude in reply.

"How much did you want?"

But the young man of enterprise was not held by the question: he had already made inquiries and could be mournfully definite.

"To staart with—twenty pound," he said, and smiled hopelessly.

She nodded, but made no comment. He was not surprised that she had nothing to say. What was there that she could say? If he had demanded a thousand she could have had no greater difficulty to find encouragement for his dream. And so he turned away while she got down again to her work, the significant work of the family. And all that day she never once alluded to his scheme.

Usually she went to bed before he did. She was only fit

for bed when at last she put down her sewing for the day. But to-night it was he who went up first. In the little, dimly-lighted kitchen he had left her, to follow him later up the narrow creaking stairs.

"I've got something I want to do first," she had said.

He nodded and smiled to himself, thinking what would happen if ever he could embark on his great plan, and so he stumbled away and up. "A bit of stitching," was what kept her, he supposed. Once, from the stair foot, he looked back into the little, dark, overcrowded kitchen. He thought it looked a dreary place for her to end her days in. And then the face of this sanguine giant changed as he thought of the great emancipation he had planned for himself, and therefore for her. Let him but put his hand on the capital. . . .

He continued on his way to his bed.

In the room below his mother worked on steadily, her head as usual near the flickering oil lamp. She knew that it was beginning to burn low, for about the air there floated minute specks of soot. It required oil, but oil involved the effort of opening the back-door and getting in the oil-can. That task should wait till the morning. The half-realised picture of any other work of that sort to-night gave her a sort of nausea. It seemed like the last turn of a screw. But she still bent over her needle. An observer might have been impressed by some change in her, which had only shown itself since her son's departure. Indeed, it must have seemed that her attention was much less on the work she did than on something outside. She listened, and, in the room above, going heavily as he undressed, went her ineptly-footed son. Finally there was silence : she listened eagerly. But at last she was satisfied that he was in bed.

It was then that Mrs. Windmill stood up, and it was as if now this little, bent woman with the weary eyes and shrunken body expanded, grew visibly in personality. The glimmering lamp, with its yellow flame sinking, and its wick smouldering, continued to throw strange shadows across her face, but showed up also the new gleam in her eyes.

Stepping softly towards the hearth, this transformed and now exalted woman quickly set her hand to a brick in the recess. It was quite loose, and she drew it out with scarcely an effort. Then inserting her hand she plucked from the aperture a canvas bag which, being drawn forth, made a metallic jingle. Carrying this to the light of the lamp she slowly, and with a certain air of performing a ritual, turned the pouch of the bag upon the table.

And then, still slowly, as if there were, in the occasion, demands for a special sort of dignity, she raised the bottom of the bag.

And now, upon the table, appeared a little heap of gold coins—sovereigns, with here and there a guinea. They gave a new, queer, yellow splendour to the drab and narrow scene; and looking upon them, her tired eyes were lighted with fire. Softly, half wonderingly, she touched them. It must have seemed a miracle to her that they should still be there. If she had confessed she would probably have owned to a suspicion of banks. In her day that suspicion was a deeply founded thing. A bank took your money and kept it. You read also about banks that failed. And you knew somebody in the next village who was to go to the workhouse, because the bank had lost the money which hitherto had kept him out.

But it was still a miracle that all this material wonder should be content to live in your ingle, to appear and give you visions when you chose to summon it. She began to count as before she had counted. "Twenty-one—twenty-two—twenty-three—twenty-four—twenty-five." And soon there would be silver enough to change into one more sovereign.

She eyed the money with nothing of the lust of the miser, but with the love, mingled with the astonishment, of a child—if of a child made weary by a world deficient in these gay and shining things. For it was the glitter as well as the significance of the metal which pleased, and even refreshed her, as so often it had done in secret before. Secret! For not even Daniel had a suspicion. For all these years this small hoard had been growing by means of a

painful addition of shilling to shilling. A little extra work before breakfast, a little additional straining of the eyes in the lamp-light after supper—such had been the means whereby this little wealth was gathered.

In gathering it she had no object in view, but that life had its " come-shorts." Sooner or later a sickness would befall; or a removal; or there would be a failure in custom. Certainly some emergency would arise. It is the thought of these emergencies, these wild beasts coming suddenly out of the jungle of existence and glaring upon you with red, famished eyes, which fills the minds of the poor with restless dread. It is the insecurity in face of these perils, even more than the thing itself, which delivers men and women to the terrors of life. And for this woman these pieces of gold, emblems of romance, bearers of colour into her life, lamps to light her imagination, were also the everyday fund which rendered the thought of sickness bearable, and that promised to delay for half a year, at least, a descent into the dungeons of the parish.

She had prepared for an emergency. But she had covenanted with herself that the emergency must be real indeed before she parted with this abiding comfort in shining metal pieces. If once she let it go she could never recover it. Her last security against want or humiliation would be gone. Life, hard as it was, was at least endurable; but would it be endurable if she saw starvation or dishonour closing in upon her, with no defence at hand?

And yet, she must make her sacrifice and make it now. He had said twenty pounds. . . . Slowly, and with a wistful sadness, she counted twenty of these golden wonders, and, setting them up in two piles, wrapped each pile in a piece of soft paper. Newspaper would have been too dishonouring a dress, one might say shroud; for the material thing was the shell of a hope and a security; and rough paper would have seemed like the coarse wrappings which careless hands thrust upon the corpse of a pauper.

When all was prepared she replaced the seven pounds that still were to be spared in their canvas bag. She had a fancy that they rejoiced to be back there, yet sorrowed for their

doomed fellows. Replacing the bag in the hollow space, she returned the brick to its place, and then, having lighted her candle, she extinguished the lamp, the smouldering wick of which showed red after the light was out.

Standing now in the light only of a dip, the flame of which set shadows leaping about her head, she eyed the two packets lying on the table.

Then grasping these in one hand as she took the candle in the other, Mrs. Windmill left the kitchen—and left a darkness behind her in which the spirit of the place may have smiled with a sort of tenderness, before resuming that ironic gesture by which it seemed to be signified in the affairs of men.

III

In the morning at breakfast Mrs. Windmill delivered herself.

"I've been a-thinkin', Dan'l. You're sure that yon thought of yours for the poultry do not be some piece of silliness?"

"Why, I'm sure it ain't, mother," cried the giant, made sanguine, as we often are, by a passion to escape out of the web of circumstance.

"Then if you do be sure——" She paused for his reaffirmation.

"Oh, I'm sure all roight."

"Then if you're sure, I can, I'm a-thinkin', find you that twenty pound."

He sprang up. "You can? You say you can? But how can you do that, mother? Who do you know? I don't see——"

She smiled, if a little wanly, for she was thinking of her small security lost; even the little security for his happiness or comfort. For there would be nothing now if he fell sick.

"It be my savings," she explained. "I saved it for a heap o' years past. It don't be much. But there be what you ask for."

He stared at her amazed. Perhaps his sheer astonishment numbed his senses, so that he accepted the fact without a struggle. Wistfully she watched his reception of her announcement, and thought he took it too easily. Perhaps, because she thought that, she said :

" You'll just have to prove that you're roight, that you *can* do with it what you say."

" Why, of course I'll prove that. And since you've promised to help me, mother, I'll be off to see Walker about the wood and wire I'll be needin', and then I'll step over to Coppinger's. It'll be foine work buying pedigree birds, them there Cochin Chinas that they talk about, from the man that wouldn't give me a day's job when I arsk him ! "

And so did Daniel Windmill set out upon this first act in execution of his scheme. It was to him wonderful, to the verge of unbelief, that at the very moment when he had formed his plan, the money should be forthcoming. Yet he had a curious, vague sense of irritation. All this time he had been assuming his mother's entire lack of any protection against old age and poverty, save the work she toiled at throughout the long day in the little kitchen. She scarcely made what was needed, he had told himself. And now she had produced twenty pounds ! Yet his grievance was certainly to be stifled as ignoble ; and so he reproved himself.

The great, the wonderful fact was that he could go on—that the scheme which he had believed to be a mere fantastic dream was capable of being at once turned into a glorious reality. And, with *it* a reality, other things became at once possible. For instance, his mother would be provided for ; and more than ever now must she be provided for. Then, with her safe, the nightmare of the showman would be laid for ever. He could even see that tall, dark man—tall in terms of the ordinary conception of the word (why did he always make that qualification ?)—coming towards him, and himself turning him away lightly and easily with a " Why, man, it wouldn't pay me ! I do very well here at home with my poultry, and pigs, and what not."

Finally, the possibility of Mabel became the most glorious of all realities. He paused. . . . His mother . . . Mabel. He had not thought fit to speak of her to his mother. Actually he knew that he dared not. And now, more than ever, he determined that she must not be told. There was no need to say a word. In another week Mabel Hathage would have returned to Stowe, where she lived, and where she was to have regular employment. It would never occur to his mother that he had a sweetheart at Stowe. Only the boldest young men went so far afield for their wives. He would keep his secret.

And when, a week later, Mabel had departed and removed the centre of his gravity to the village on the coast, the giant was satisfied that his secret remained intact. . . .

In the meantime he had established his first new run, he had bought a half-dozen birds of the best strain, and had been into Gippeswick by the bus and found dealers who were ready to take his produce. They received him with less respect than he had looked for, some of them keeping him talking with a kind of amusement that galled him bitterly. He knew that they found him an oddity, and he grew self-conscious under their gaze. It was perhaps his speech that amused them; but it wasn't only or chiefly his speech, the speech of one little accustomed to go in and out among men, chaffering and holding his own.

There was something else. Twice he overheard . . . "How 'e do run up a-legs. Funny-looking feller."

And then, "Yes, more than that. Aw could hardly keep my face straight to talk to him. Aw gave him an order for the fun of having him comin' here. He do be a reg'lar freak; nothin' else; what they call a freak o' nature."

The giant ground his teeth to keep the tears out of his eyes. It wasn't only the boys in the village at home. . . .

CHAPTER VII

I

MABEL had vanished from Oldborne with only an hour or two's warning to her tall lover. He had happened to pass, and she had beckoned him in. "I'm off in two hours," she had said. "The other gal's coming back this afternoon instead of next week. And now I've told you, you'd better be moving."

"But," he protested from his height above her, "I must see you; say good-bye. A proper lover has a roight——"

"Don't you talk about roights, or bein' a proper lover! I've not said yet you've got roights. Anyhow I can't have you here."

"But where am I to see you?"

"Stowe isn't that far, is it? That is, if I wanted to see you. You'd have to come late after dark, that is. But you could do that. Lots of fellers do that. And——"

He had found himself outside ere he knew how she had done it. Well, he *could* go over to Stowe. Afterwards, on reflection, his feelings were mixed. The day following he knew that if he felt bereft, he was also oddly relieved. Sick as he was for sight of her, he rejoiced that it would be his part to go to her, rather than hers to come to him. For his enjoyment of her presence in Oldborne must always be dulled by his fear of being seen with her, and involved in a ridicule which would be like a sea carrying her away from him. But now that he could go to her all would be well, and already he felt established on a new footing of security. In Stowe, as he informed himself, he would be even as other men. He could walk into that village and be blessedly unknown, if not inconspicuous. And the long nights would soon be here, when even his height would not be noticeable, since the darkness would be kind and hide him.

At the same time the thought of going into Stowe roused in him new emotions that were compacted of alarms. When he went to visit Mabel at Stowe it would be into her country that he would be advancing. In Oldborne she had merely lodged; had indeed proclaimed her thankfulness that she had no abiding place in that "dull hole." But in Stowe the girl had her home; there this princess had her palace, and into this he must now learn to enter familiarly. He felt himself already in contact with an atmosphere obscurely inimical. There might be all sorts of prohibitions raised. Her parents, of whom she had scarcely spoken to him, might have completely other ideas for her disposal. They, at least, would ask questions. Well, he had his answer now. He was a poultry farmer, rapidly establishing himself—if, strictly speaking, with a business only one week old!

But now succeeded a new doubt. Not only her parents might have other ideas. What right had he to assume that Mabel's mind turned only to him? He had only known her detached from her own surroundings and away from her friends. But now she had been received back into a community where she knew and was known of many. The minds of maidens were easily moved. And in Stowe there would be young men. . . . For a moment his heart fainted. He thought of the sheer wonder of the fact that she, with all that she had to give of grace, and feeling, and beauty, should have for a moment considered him. He sought to recover his assurance by telling himself that she had been attracted to him strictly for himself, and for nothing that she could suppose he represented. But then he tortured himself with the thought that he had talked a little at large. He had wanted desperately to impress. And he could not evade the stern self-charge that he had made over-statements. "I am my own master." If her interest in him had ever sprung from some false notion of his consequence . . . but that danger was over. Whatever he might have been, he was now, certainly, a man of property.

He would go to her with confidence, and he would go the next day.

II

It was late when the giant set out for Stowe. He preferred to have it thus. And he remembered her words, which she had spoken, indeed, vehemently. He must come "after dark." He had looked at her at the moment, wondering what her motive could be, since obviously it could not be his.

Planning this visit, he considered the question of his mother. But he resolved not to tell her. He had never made her his true confidante. She did not know that he feared to go out alone: he was still satisfied that she had no suspicion of the persecution to which he was subjected. And now there was something else which she must not know.

He had, however, a curious strain of honesty, and when she challenged him:

"Where are you off to now togither?"

"I'm walking over to Stowe," he answered.

"To Stowe?" Out of dark eyes, made darker by the shadows and the black hair that never lost its lustre, she considered him gravely. "To Stowe, at *this* time? It's nigh dark already."

"No worse for that," he answered fluently. And then to evade another question he set out. The evening was bright with stars, in whose company he felt at peace. They moved, as it seemed to him, like himself, towards some beautiful if mysterious objective. He looked up, drawing in a quick breath, for the sight of so much still and inaccessible glory always gave him a strange thrill. Somewhere beyond these golden planets was the seat of God; those stars must, indeed, be merely the wayside approaches to the shining City.

He found that to-night his mind raised itself easily to thoughts of the beauty beyond the stars. He had a curious, deep sense of exaltation. He felt himself ride almost above the earth level. He drew in draughts of the wind meeting him from the sea, and it seemed to him that the quickening

air came to welcome him, recognising his place in Stowe and offering him strength to hasten there.

The hedgerows, seen by starlight, were shadowy enough to take on an outline suggestive of forms between tree-life and the human. Sometimes a branch, a little outgrown, swayed dimly towards him, and the subtle perfection of the movement touched him to new ecstasy.

He went on, singing. His voice was high and thin, but he did not know it. He sang as the stars sang; as the wind blew; as the tree swayed. And he sang for the same reason. He was in love, even as they were.

Approaching Stowe at last he had to pass through the small community of Wadleigh, which in his day provided the seaside village of Stowe with its food and other material requirements. There were a few dim lights in street windows, and a group of figures here and there at corners. He quickened his pace, but did not escape before he heard:

"Eoo! Thought I saw a movin' lamp-post or suffen."

"No, it wore only that funny long feller over from Oldborne."

There was laughter. He flushed and went on. So they knew him here?

Though he was already on the outskirts of Stowe he had still a walk of half a mile. The road was not clearly marked, but he knew that the home of the Hathages was near to the sea front. She had told him that he was not to come to the house. There was, she had said, a road near to the edge of the sea; it was marked by a long tarred shed where fishermen kept their nets and tackle. Describing it, she had added:

"You can stand about there. If I'm out for a walk I'll come that way."

The giant, stumbling over displaced stones and odds and ends of spars, at last approached what seemed to him should be the rendezvous. Further up the road, a little set back, stood a row of low-walled cottages, from the windows of which beams struck out into the roadway here and there. It was among these cottages that the home of the Hathages was situated.

To reach the point he had passed by another such bunch of cottages, so that the fishermen's shed lay in the gap between. The giant did not know that this shed was a well-recognised loitering-place, that its crude and gust-shaken walls had listened to many a tale of passion as crude as themselves. Even as he stumbled up towards it two figures flitted away. He felt knowing, and smiled happily, and his benediction certainly followed the departing pair. He found himself extraordinarily caught up in the movement in which, as he felt, those other lovers, dim delightful shadows in the starlight, were involved. It seemed as if he had never lived till now, when he had suddenly touched some magic door which, flying open, had immediately admitted him to the world of a new creation. . . .

Coming to the edge of the shed he stood still and drew in a deep breath. So far as he could judge now, with the departure of the pair whose presence he must have disturbed, he was left in sole possession. Behind him, unseen but audible, he discovered the sea breaking gently to-night, as if to spare the whispers of lovers, upon the high, pebbly beach. Once, overhead, a sea-bird screamed, leaving for him an eternal impress on the atmosphere. He could remember that sound always afterwards. But save for the lapping of the sea, silence was in possession. His eye stole to the tiny red glow behind the cottage windows. In the first of these houses, as he knew, she lived. So that now, at any moment, there would be a movement in that room towards the door, a widening of the golden stream of light crossing from under the door to the edge of night opposite; and then she would come. Presently, of course, he would not need to keep back when so close to the door; he would be going to the house; he would be meeting her there. But maidens had strange whims, he believed, and were not to be hurried. Their beautiful timidity was something, indeed, that must not be injured, for it was part of their nature. And the thought of meeting her in the darkness had a strange attraction for the giant, for it had a suggestion of doing something secret. One could even pretend that one did something forbidden. Life was beautiful; life was

romantic; in the darkness, full of colour; and under the starshine, full of glory.

Yes, for the moment he would be content with the present condition of meetings in the shadow of night, but he would hope for the day when, tenderly and shyly, she would draw him in at that door and present him as hers. Her father and mother would welcome him, and if they should choose to ask what he had to offer their daughter—why, by then the new enterprise of the poultry farm would have been set securely upon its feet! He had never seen Hathage, but it was unlikely that the man would trouble to make a six-mile journey twice in order to examine the possessions of a possible suitor for the hand of his daughter. So that he could feel safe from parental inquisition, which he rather dreaded, until he was an established man—as, so soon, he would be.

He was still standing there beside the shed in the dark, and hearing only the lap-lapping of the untroubled sea behind him, when suddenly he stiffened to attention. It seemed to him that he had heard something. What he had heard he could not be sure, but it seemed like a movement near at hand, as if somebody, like himself standing in the protection of this tarred wall, had changed position. Surely *she* had not been standing here all this time, waiting for him, as he for her? The thought seized and troubled him so that he began stumbling round the shed in search. He had not before closely observed this creaking erection. But he saw now that it was larger than he had supposed, though not higher, and that it extended to a frontage of twenty-five to thirty feet, and seemed to have not fewer than three doors at intervals. Plainly it was the possession of more than one fisherman, and was divided up into compartments. But when he moved round it he could not discover that any of the doors were open. One he tried: then it occurred to him that to be seen doing so might be misunderstood, and he passed the next two doors with only a close scrutiny. At intervals he listened. Twice, three times, he did this without result, and hearing only the gentle beat of the sea upon the underground pebbles.

But pausing suddenly for a fourth time he was assured that another step ceased, a step too late to conceal itself. Somebody else was moving round the shed, and doing so with an intent to avoid revealing his presence. The giant increased his pace, and discovered at once that the unknown did the same. But his first idea that Mabel was here was ended at once, for he satisfied himself that the step was that of a man.

When he had completed the journey round the shed and had got back to the point from which he could see the Hathages' cottage, he stopped. He had become suddenly uneasy. But when he told himself that he was being a fool, and that he was merely letting himself be played on by old dreads of an ambush, he could not be satisfied. After all, he was not being followed here by his young persecutors. A boy does not walk twelve miles out and home, to an unfamiliar scene, on the odd chance of being able to humiliate a victim always to be had easily and at any time in his own village.

But, if there could be present no mere boy persecutor, he could not imagine anybody here with an intent unfriendly to himself. Yet the sound of these footsteps was seriously troubling to the sensitive mind of the giant. It seemed to him to be mysteriously suggestive of something, the opposite of that exquisite sense of nature and beauty and love which had sustained and exalted him on his journey and in the first moments of waiting. He shuddered and drew into the close shadow of the shed, considering what to do, and whether to move around the building, or to call out a challenge.

In the meantime he was looking anxiously towards the house of the Hathages, or "hers" as they said in Suffolk. If he could be sure of Mabel's figure in the darkness he would have liked to meet her away from this place. But he feared to miss her.

Indeed, he feared more than that. He was infected with an obscure but general form of fear. His mind, susceptible to-night to the slightest impressions, had grown sick, and he trembled. All about him the thick darkness seemed

infected with dread, and it would have relieved him to call out. Yet he kept silent and still waited; and listened with the nervous horror with which a victim hears the stealthy, nearing footsteps of his intending assassin.

Then again he rebuked himself: he played no true man's part as he stood there waiting for a woman to whom he would be protector. Protector? Deep down in his heart he cried out as ever he did, that he must never be put to the test. For how should he survive it—he who carried no force in all his seven-foot-odd of bones and skin? Even now if he were to challenge this mysterious unseen. . . .

But suddenly the faint beams from the distant windows were reinforced by the warm glow cast by the flame of a lamp whose brightness could now escape through an open door.

Straining his eyes he discerned a figure that might be hers. Within the minute she must be in his arms, but he decided that she must not meet him here. The thought of imperilling the beauty of their meeting, perhaps of allowing a threat of something worse, so overcame him that he hurried forward. And in the darkness, a figure moving lightly and coming abreast of him, he spoke softly.

"Mabel?"

The figure stopped.

"It be, bain't it?" he cried.

"P'r'aps. P'r'aps it be," answered the voice he knew, coolly. "But I thought I say——"

"Yes—but," he began, "I'm only a bare twenty yards away from where you say——"

"All the same," and she seemed to pout, adding, "I never say I wanted you at moine——"

"I warn't comin' to yours," he answered with a simple dignity, but without trying to conceal his disappointment in the character of their meeting.

"Well, you were gittin' very near."

"But you'll be takin' me there one of these here days," he said, with an uncomfortable laugh, his confidence wilted.

"Shall I?" she answered indifferently, standing opposite to him in the darkness.

"Why, o' course you will—dear. When you take me for your man afore the world."

"Don't you call it out for all that same world to hear," she said sharply.

Involuntarily he looked behind. Down the road loomed the shed.

"Did *you* hear somebody then?"

"I don't know what you mane!" she answered.

"No matter," he said. And then boldly taking her arm, he stepped towards the house she had left.

"Here, where are you taking me to?" she cried sharply.

"I thought we wore a-goin' for a walk," he said mildly, "and I wore takin' you."

"Back to moine? *That* don't be the way. The way go *this* here way," and she took a step.

"But—but that mane you have to go by the shed."

He was determined he must not communicate his fears to her: it was a man's part to protect his woman from all unnecessary alarms.

"Go by the shed? Of course we go by the shed."

"But couldn't we go some tother way?" he pleaded.

"Some tother way? Why, o' course we couldn't. What way is there?"

"We moight go alongside o' the sea."

"Not if I knows it. You'd be droppin' me in—lettin' me get drowned or suffen with your moonin'."

"I don't know what come over you this night, indeed I don't," exclaimed the poor giant, peering down from his height.

"Then if you are not satisfied I'd better be going back," she said. "It be dark and cold enough to freeze you, and if you've no other word——"

"Why, o' course I've other word! My dear, oh, my dear, as if my heart weren't too full o' words! Only let us foind a place to sit and talk. And you'll know what I've got to say——"

"Poor giant!" she said, and did not see the little contraction of pain that for a moment caught him. She had never called him that before. It was the name of all others

he could have spared. But he reacted to her change of mood, her new tenderness; and feeling the touch of her little warm hand on his arm he straightened his body and put out his foot in awkward attempt to keep step with her. But a moment later he stopped again. "You don't mean—you *rarely* want to go to yon liddle ole shed?"

"Why not? Haven't I said——"

"No, but—but couldn't we git to the road some other way?"

"But we don't want to git to the road."

Her words gave him a new and terrible idea.

"You don't mean you want to sit down—there?" he cried.

"Why, o' course. That's what I mean a'-zactly."

"But it don't be any place for you. . . . It's rare dark and you'd be frawn——"

"Oh, if it fare too cold for you I'll not trouble you, and I suppose, being so unnatural long, it *do* be a bit cold for you on the top." She had lost her softness.

"*Don't*, dear," he cried in sharp agony, and perhaps something in his tone made her pause, for she peered up at his face with those eyes of his, in the dark set so mysteriously above her.

"Sorry," she said, with superficial compunction. "Didn't mean to hurt. But you are a bit runty you know, giant! And as for saying it be dark, I thought that's what a bor like when he be out with his gal."

"Of course that be," he cried in answer to the goad, speaking in his hurried, high-pitched tone, "only—only I don't loike the shed. You'd never feel sure——"

"Sure?"

"Well, that you'd be alone."

"Heap o' nonsense!" They had been drawing close to the black shape that seemed to him like the shape of doom, and she turned now off the road to cross the few yards of shingle to the hut.

"No!" In one last half-frantic effort he held her arm. "Please, Mabel. Call it a fancy o' moine just to-noight——"

She turned and again peered at him. "Oh, I'll call it

a fancy of yours if you like. You're a rare heap o' fancies. But I don't stay—no, I don't. It's your fancy not to go. But it do be mine—just for to-night," she went on, mimicking him.

His hands fell to his side; uneasily he made to accompany her, and in a moment more they were standing beside the shed in the darkness. Suddenly he stood still. It must have been obvious to her from the tenseness of his figure that he listened, and that his attention was momentarily withdrawn from herself.

"Well?" she said sharply.

"Oh, nawthen," he cried a little shrilly, interrupted—caught, as it seemed, in his act of listening. "I wore only——"

"You looked as if you wore frawn to the ground or something. But aren't you going to find me a seat now I've come out to you?"

Thus with a pretty insolence she rallied him, and the giant looked about him helplessly, kicking out a foot to feel for a log.

"I don't think there be anything loikely here."

"Oh, ain't there? There's a big log about here, just *here*—by day, that's rale noice," she said.

For a moment a suspicion caught him: then he breathed again, for of course she only knew the log by seeing it by day.

He bent down and began searching by touch of hand.

"There something here. It might do. Will you sit here—dear?"

He had dropped his voice, being horribly conscious of an indecency. That an eavesdropper should still be there, using the night for disguise, and that in such a hearing a lover should use an endearment, seemed to him to endanger the whole grace of this precious hour.

But the girl had sat down resolutely at once on the seat he had found, and it was merely for him to sink into the place against her. Yet when he had settled himself he held his breath again to listen. And she felt the tenseness in him though he loomed so dimly.

"W'at's the matter alon' o' you?" she demanded.

"Nawthen!" he answered in a whisper.

The whisper seemed to offend.

"Why do you pretend? You're quite jumpy. And you're even afeared to speak. Though what you're frit of——"

"I'm frit of nawthen."

He still listened, and because he could not now hear anyone move, tried to believe that whoever had lurked in the night close at hand had now removed himself. But Daniel had no conviction of his freedom. He felt oppressed every moment by a horrible surveillance and his speech halted again.

"Well?" Suddenly the girl challenged him.

He stroked her hand, but she withdrew it sharply.

"What's wrong—my dear?"

"You. I thought you wanted to tell me—things. And you seem frit to speak."

It was true: he was afraid to speak. But how could he tell her so?

"Frit? Why should I be frit?" He laughed and drew closer.

"Well, then—talk! I don't come here just to feel you shiverin' near me."

"My dear," he began, determined to say his part—as it had become to her, "it do be won'erful to think you're close agin me like this and to look up into the sky there and back to where you are sittin' and to feel that the stars are watchin' over my love. Life's a rare beautiful thing, isn't it, if we'd only see it. Beautiful. And the sky and the sea are all beautiful and full-loike of thoughts of you. And whenever——"

Suddenly he stopped, and as though issuing from the wall of the shed behind where they sat, he heard the sound of creaking timbers. It had ceased even as he had discovered it, but she could feel his fingers gripping her arm.

"There! agin——" He had spoken the words before he knew it.

"What?" she demanded sharply.

"I thought I heard——"

"You'm all jumps to-night. You heard nawthen. Though, ralely, if there'd been anything, which there isn't, you'd be a rale ungain one to protect a gal."

This was a challenge. He clenched his teeth.

"I—I'd defend you," he succeeded in saying.

"You'd foight anybody for me?" She had raised her voice and trapped him into doing the same. "You'd not crackle when you saw him comin'? You'd knock anybody down, would you, bor—kill him?"

"Yes. That is"—his voice grew thin and declined—"that is if one had to. I reck'n I'd do all I could." He seemed to tremble.

"You're shiverin'! I tell you you've got nawthen to be frit of." He did not again rise to her challenge.

"No. Of course, only——"

"But I tell you, you don't hear nawthen! What *could* you hear? There was nowt to hear—there couldn't be nawthen. Nobody ever come about the shed. We're alone and that's all just your old silly fidgets——"

She paused and he allowed her word to prevail. For how could he put fears into the heart of a maiden? He should, indeed, rejoice that she had not heard any sounds, and that, if she *did* hear, she was prepared to discount them.

"I know one thing," she announced now. "I'm going off to moine. It's dull here. You're loike—loike a girl with your fears. I want a man, a rale man with arms and a man's way of speakin'; a man that *be* a man——"

She said these last words loudly and clearly.

"There, my lovely one, you shan't have nawthen to grumble at," he said, made desperate by her challenge. "I only want to have you close alongside o' me. You're a rare deal to me, my Mabel. You're all won'erful—*too* won'erful I sometimes think. There be I, working at my liddle farm—that won't be so liddle some day—and sayin' to myself, 'I'm a-doin' all this for her; all this will be hers some day.' But what is it to offer her? What could men have that could put it in the scale against you, or

make an offerin' for your pretty feet, my dear? You're so lovely I see you like a river that flow in the spring. And when you move your arms, that be like a tree, that move more beautiful than anything else. You'll be a lovely wife——" He paused now, caught in the web of his own eloquence, and drawing a deep breath as if choked by the thought of her in that last character.

"Suppose," she was saying softly, "suppose I were ever your wife. What would you do to me, giant?"

"Don't call me that," he found courage to say now. "That kind o' separates——"

"Separates?"

"I don't mean *us*. I mean it seem to separate me from—from everybody. I ain't so big as all that. I'm nobbut six feet six and a bit more, which ain't a bad size for a man when he fill out—as the doctor say *I* must do afore long."

"Oh, well!" lightly and indifferently, "Daniel Windmill then."

"Thank'ee, my gal. That be more like somehow. But you say, what will I do to you? Ah! my dear, I'll give you all that there are to give—all that a man have it in power to give to such a beauteous gal."

"You have some long words, gi—— I mean Daniel! Where do you get them from?"

"Why, my dear, I wore always one for a book when there wore such to be got. Dad, he had a book or two—one called 'pieces from the poets.' There be a lot about love and maidens in that 'ere book, and often I've looked at it, noticin' words. But since you came into my thought I've more'n ever turned to a page in that book."

"And that be full o' things, like the things you say?"

"It do. There are bits from Shakespeare, that they used to tell us of in school; but them that I like best were some by that Mr. Tennyson that was over near here visitin' that there Mr. Fitzgerald at Woodbridge, and that Sam Sadd from our village rowed down the Deben. *His* poems are all about love, and they're rale beautiful——"

"Look here, Daniel," she said suddenly. "You might

bring along that book when you're here some time and give me a lend of it."

"I only borrow it out o' the books in the school, my dear. But I might come by the book some day. I might buy it. You'd read about yourself every time you read about the miller's daughter. 'And I would be the jewel that tremble at her ear.' Now that be what *I* felt. I thought of your teeny-weeny ear, and all it would be like to be, not a big long fellow—though not so big neither—but a jewel, a little shining thing hanging at your ear——"

"Very noice. But don't you go wastin' your money on no books for me. There be lots o' things I could do with afore books, I should think so indeed!"

"I loike the books. They seem to give words to they things I have in my moind about you, rare deep things I dussent say."

"Poor Daniel!"

"Why did you say that, my dear?" he asked, half flattered by her sympathy, but a little uncomprehending and therefore disturbed, and disappointed that she no longer wanted the poems.

"I were only thinkin'," she murmured, "what a lot of thinkin' you've wasted on me, haven't you?"

"Wasted?" He drew a deep breath of satisfaction. Never before had she lowered her flag to him like that.

"Wasted? Nay, liddle love, nay. I've wasted nawthen on you, for nawthen could be wasted that was given to you. Nawthen was ever good enough for you. Everything should be given to you, the lovely night sky and the green, strong sea, and the happy summer flowers, and the song of the birds, that are so full of you. And when everythin' had been given there would still, to my thinkin', be nawthen given, you be so dear and lovely a maiden."

She had been sitting very still, and his voice vibrated, lonely in the night save for the distant and soft beating of the waves upon the pleased pebbles.

"You like tellin' me, don't you?" Telling her *what*, she did not say.

"Like? I love to do so!" he declared. "It be the

thing I care for of all," he said. "I let my mind run on the thought of you till the word come, and it always seem to be the right word if *any* words ever do be enow."

"You've given me a rare lot, giant—Daniel——"

"Not more than any man give."

"Ah, well"; her voice grew lighter as if some moral pressure was relaxed. "Ah, well," with a laugh. "I suppose that is what to expect from a man—only some men are too frit to speak. Thinking o' theirselves—that's what *they* are."

"Well, that don't fare to matter what such men are—it do not matter to *us*. We've got one another, hain't we?"

He discovered in himself and in his voice an anxiety, which he tried at once to repress. He must be sure of himself, or he would infect her with some sense of insecurity.

"No, that don't matter to us!" she announced, and seemed a little to lift her voice as she went on, "a man that be a man make love to a girl proper. That's the kind a girl like. They're that conceited though, and thinkin' of theirselves, that they're talkin' all the time of what they are, and of what they do, and what won'erful turkey-cocks they do show themselves in their red coats."

"In their red coats?" echoed Daniel in a tone of wonder. "But we don't wear red coats, none of us don't, unless you mean the soldiers from the fort over yonder."

"Why, I meant nobody. I were just thinkin' of how men—all men—do like to trick theirselves out in a bit o' colour, and then expect us gals to give all our thoughts to them—lookin' at them and admirin'."

"Let us talk about ourselves only." The giant spoke in rather a troubled voice, though he knew not why he did so. Yet it seemed to him that this new uneasiness was not of the kind which had disturbed him when he had thought he heard a movement behind the shed. "You—you aren't inter-rested in anything but——?" He stopped. He could not say "me." But she finished the sentence.

"Sittin' listenin' to you? If I woren't, would I be here?

If I wanted to talk to another man would I come and sit here in the dark by the shed? If I knew a soldier in a red coat and wanted to tell him things, would I be a-talkin' to you? Wouldn't I be a-talkin' to him?"

"I wonder what make you talk so much about a soldier?" said the giant, suddenly and unhappily.

Abruptly she got up. "Oh, you're gettin' runty! And it's that miserable to sit here and have you prod me like thus'n."

"Prod you?" exclaimed the amazed giant. "*I* prod you?" He had risen and stood quivering over her in the darkness. "I can't think why you say that, Mabel, my dear, for truly I only love you and want to go on saying so——"

"Well, you've said enow for to-night," she answered lightly. "You're going to run off now."

He had hold of her soft arm and clung to it, though she seemed to push him away.

"I hain't hurt you, Mabel—dear?"

"Hurt me?" she exclaimed. "No. You've not hurt me. But you've talked enow and I've listened till I'm wore out, and it be toime for you to go."

"But you'll let me take you back to your door?"

"No need for that, giant. We can part here. Your way is over there. I'll go back when I'm ready."

"But," he began, "I don't like leavin' you here——"

"What a heap o' nonsense! When I can see my own door——"

"I don't mane that. But——" He hesitated. He did not want to alarm her by telling her of the footsteps he had heard.

"Oh, you and your frights!" she burst in impatiently. "I'm tired of them. And I give you warnin' that you'll have to be a bit brighter if ever I see you again."

"If ever you see me? But I'm comin' over again on Thursday—dear. You said so."

"You take a lot for granted, don't you? I said I might be able to meet you on Thursday, but I'm not so sure that I shall be——"

" But you won't blame me because I was stupid to-night? I wore bothered—by—but no matter——" For he would not tell her. " Only I wish I might take you homewards, my dear," he pleaded, ingenuously tender.

" Oh, well. We'll go towards the house." Perhaps by this means she counted on more easily getting him to go. Certainly she made the concession, and the pair came to the edge of the block of cottages where the dim light fell before she stopped.

" Well, good-night now," she said, shortly.

He stooped over her, his lips seeking.

" No, you've been too dull to-night! " she cried, and then, as if she had a slight compunction and could sense his misery through the darkness: " Well. Just one."

He was proud of the feat by which he kissed her, not once but twice. And then, because the poor giant knew that never could he tear himself away unless he ran, he turned and lumbered quickly over the rough track past the hut and on into the night. When he reached the point which was the last from which he could look back at the lamp beam in the roadway, he turned about. He had expected to hear her door close, but he had not heard it. Nor could he see her figure where he had left her in the light cast from the house upon the roadway.

He waited a moment and then with a sigh resumed his departure. As he did so a sound from the direction of the hut caught his attention. It seemed to him a sound of voices, and while still he listened he thought he heard laughter. But it did not matter now, he told himself; he and his girl had had their hour, and she must now be safely indoors.

CHAPTER VIII

DANIEL reached home in a state of recovered ecstasy. The uneasiness occasioned by the sound behind the shed was forgotten in his vivid and only surviving memory of Mabel's voice, and Mabel's hand, and her nearness. His heart sang of her, and he offered his happiness to the stars, that they should rejoice with him. He saw the night spangled with the reflected glory of his and her mutual passion, and all creation vivid with the beauty of love.

He drew in great draughts of air, expanding his narrow lungs and imagining himself the very man that should go with the height of him; and he came into the little kitchen, where his mother worked, with his eyes shining so that she, looking up at him, must have found the lamp dim. Yet her glance at him was narrow and, if he had had eyes to observe her, unusual in kind.

"Why did you sit up for me, mother?" he challenged her gently.

"Sit up for you? I didn't sit up for you, son. I sat up because there wore work to be done." And she peered at a seam, holding it close to the lamplight—only the next moment to give him a keen, sidelong glance again, as if she sought for something, but would not be caught in search.

The giant stood, arrested and uncertain. He had entered with a vigour imparted by the warmth, swiftness, and ecstasy of his thought, but he found himself troubled, as one who brings into the atmosphere breathed by another a more vigorous air. He felt he disturbed. Also he discovered in her aspect a source of reproach to himself. He did not find that she consciously dealt that reproach herself; but of its presence he was certainly aware. And

what he told himself was that if he was but in the way of earning an income, his mother would not now be forced to work late with that needle of hers. If the lawyer, or the land agent, had found him a clerkship she would be sitting there like a lady, sewing only when she chose. But neither the lawyer nor the agent had been willing to employ him. So was he blameable?

Yet he knew that he was. And if there had been no Mabel Hathage, might he not in the end have conquered his shame and repugnance, and accepted the showman's offer? Was not it his ambition to be, in the eyes of the girl, a man like other men; which had been the governing motive in making him borrow his mother's money to risk in the poultry farm? He knew that very well; and knew, too, that when he saw himself implicitly forgetful of his mother in visiting Mabel, he reproached himself justly. It was his love for Mabel which made him refuse to do the one thing that should rescue his mother.

In the meantime his mother's eye had returned to her work, and she offered nothing with which to break the silence that followed. At last he moved.

"I'm now goin' to bed," he said.

"'Twould be as well. You'll have to be up early. As for me, I'll go as soon as I well can, but that 'on't be for an hour yet."

He stepped across to her, bent down and kissed her forehead—a salute which she accepted a thought wearily, as it may have seemed to him. But it might also have appeared that, as he withdrew his head, she took the opportunity of its exposure to the light to search his face quickly and strictly. A moment later she had bent over her sewing again.

"Yes. You go to bed. Good-night."

"Good-night, mother." And he went out.

Yet in his little room upstairs the giant continued to be uneasy. Certainly the ecstasy of the night was abated, the glory dimmed. He was increasingly aware of a duty to his mother which he had not performed. If he could have felt that his use of her savings was being triumphantly

justified there might have been a reason for telling himself that his self-reproaches were exaggerated. But so far the scheme, which, in its inception, had seemed so promising, hung fire. So far there had been expense but no sort of return. Of course it was absurd to expect to make money at once. But, easily sanguine, the giant easily lost confidence. The sight of his mother, strained and weary, succeeded by the reminder of how much more so she must become if his scheme failed now, was enough to fill him with the worst forebodings.

He was long falling asleep.

CHAPTER IX

I

TWO nights after the visit to Stowe, and while he waited impatiently for a sign from Mabel or a summons to go again, Daniel took a walk upon the Gippeswick road. He often went there, because he loved the woods on the Deeks-Feavier estate which came down to the road. He would stand leaning over the hedge watching the wild life within the enclosure. A fluttered partridge, darting sheer from the ground with an explosion of wings, or a squirrel with the air all squirrels have of deprecating attack, hopping up the wide thoroughfare made for it by the trunk of an oak, were sights enough to thrill him and send him home with a lighted eye. He did not often climb over into the park, because he lived in days when there was no approval of the most innocent trespassers; a nature-lover who pleaded his passion would get short shrift.

But to-night the giant, looking into the wood, experienced a sense of intense exhilaration; and a feeling of the kind always made him venturesome. He knew why he had that excited feeling. He was reacting to a vivid and intense memory of the meeting with Mabel. His mind was always quick to rise: it ascended easily. It had the property of floating in air: perhaps it lacked weight, *body*.

Suddenly, as he leaned over, looking deep into the undergrowth, there was a movement as of something living; and his quick eye was in time to see a hare scurry across a narrow space between trees, the white lining of its cocked tail gleaming silver-like.

Instantly his heart was aroused. He sprang lightly over and into the wood and made after the lively thing. Some such stirring was all that he needed to make him thus dash

in. Borne on his sense of excitement, he pushed lightly on, though the hare was a quarter of a mile away by now. But he had at once forgotten the hare—or had ceased to consider it as some separate entity. Of one thing only was he conscious: that life was something vivid and exquisite, and that Mabel and himself and yonder flying puss were all parts of a whole and made a happy unison.

Now that he was well within the wood he went more slowly. He remembered that he was trespassing here, and that, if a keeper found him, there might be trouble. The risk was not great, but it had to be considered. On the other hand, being here, carried on the crest of the wave of emotional excitement, he might as well stay. And when he had found a place that invited him, he flung himself down upon the leaf-mould and waited. From somewhere near came the soft crooning of wood-pigeons, a sound which seems to signify the sum of all other sweet murmurs coming up from the world. In a distant brake an invisible blackbird whistled. Behind him some creature of earth wriggled its way through the lowest undergrowth. Yet he was duly conscious of the profound silence to which the sounds of these woodland creatures, so far from troubling, seemed to give significance. This was *their* world, and only sounds that seemed to invade the sovereignty of their peace could be called noise.

He flattered himself that he enjoyed the freedom of their country, and he lay quiet and receptive, in spite of the high spiritual excitement which had provided him with the impulse to come here. In the meantime the shadows began to fall until here, in among the trees, there was a state of half-night. He had learnt several secrets of the life herein lived, and found that a new quickness of perception which he discovered in himself was really the direct general result of that particular perception of the vividness and beauty of life which love had brought. These creatures and their loves and their obscure desires and their actions really interpreted his own thoughts to himself.

He was still lying on his back, though about to move

lest he should be found here after dark, when he heard the unmistakable sound, first of feet and then of voices.

The keepers! It could only be the keepers. The giant grew alarmed. If they found him here now they would certainly accept no excuses. And, when he thought of it, how should they accept them? What more absurd than the excuse that, feeling very lightsome from being in love, he had thrown himself over a fence into private grounds where hares and partridges ran?

There was but one thing for it—to lie still and trust to luck. Once before he had escaped by that means, and there was always the chance that they might pass him by, even though it was not yet dark enough for him to be unseen. Very gently he drew himself within a bush just behind his head. Here he could see, while at the same time having a fair chance of remaining unseen.

He had got himself well within cover, when, slowly and heavily, the steps drew nearer. A fact that impressed him at once was that the talking that went on was low-pitched, as if the speaker had a purpose in not being heard. This quiet speaking seemed ominous, as if the men had seen him and proposed to come upon him suddenly.

But when they were close up, so that he could already see the outline of their figures and hear them speaking, the giant drew a breath of hope. They would not speak if they knew him so near. He lay still, hoping now to escape the humiliation of being found: he perfectly realised that two men, or even one of ordinary strength, could overpower him without difficulty, and contrive to do it in a way that should shame him.

And still the two men came on, until now he could see the dark outline of one of them quite close. The figure looked unfamiliar: the gamekeepers were known to him by sight. And while he waited with held breath a voice spoke.

"We'll draw nawthen to-night. Them keepers 'll be around any minute now." (So they were not keepers but poachers!) Daniel felt a little thrill. Like all his class he had no blame for such pleasant outlaws. And he felt and

allowed himself to enjoy now a curious sensation of kinship. They were all three liable to prosecution if found where they were. All the same he refrained from making himself known. They might charge him with being a spy. He waited, and a second voice answered the first. And as he heard it, Daniel experienced a new feeling of disturbance. It was an alarm that had no real relation to the words said, and that he could only associate with the effect upon him of hearing that voice. And it was not a voice that he had heard before.

"No, we'll not stop, Tom. I've a way of doin' a little on my own when I'm crossed, and I don't choose to swing for a couple o' greasy keepers. When a job's got to be do, I'm your man; but that's got to be worth while. The crib we've just seen—now there be business in cracking *it*. But no quarrels with them darty jackals."

The other man began to laugh, a noisy, rather frank laugh, and taking a step forward made it possible for Daniel to get a glimpse of his face and form. Peering out from his covert the giant, himself still undiscovered of the others, saw that the man was young, and somewhat above the middle height, with a small, extraordinarily well-shaped head, curly brown hair, and very bright blue smiling eyes. The face was full and ruddy, if the smallness of the mouth hinted a certain peevishness in the character. But more admirable than even the face and head was the figure, which was in every way justly proportioned and remarkable for the easy carriage. The man wore a tight-fitting brown suit of homespun and yellow cloth leggings, and one might have thought he had outgrown his clothes or was wearing to-day an old, long-disused garment. The giant's eyes were quick to take in the particular detail that the arm had outgrown the sleeve. Had *he* not been laughed at because his arms had outgrown the sleeves of his coat? But he felt no sympathy for this young man. What he experienced was an extraordinary emotion of jealousy and fear. The fear he could by no means explain, but the jealousy he knew was derived from the fact that this unknown, suffering from the same inconvenience of outgrown clothes as

himself, did not suffer in appearance for that cause, but seemed to steal a kind of distinction from it, as if his perfection of figure and movement were only accentuated by the failure of his dress to cover him.

This young man "Tom," as he seemed to be called, now passed noisily along the narrow path, and a moment later the giant lost his view of him. He still lay quiet, however, for he knew that there was that second man to pass. This other could now be heard pushing his way through the undergrowth, behind the head of the hidden giant, who had a curious sort of conviction that it was less important that he should look at this other man whose voice lingered even terrifyingly in his ear.

For another ten minutes the giant lay still, balancing his fears of the men who had gone against his fears of the keepers who might even then be approaching. But at last he judged it safe to move, and running in his awkward way towards the road, he gained it without being noticed, and was soon back in Oldborne.

But he still thought of the pair to whom, for a brief time, he had lived so close. The young male beauty who shamed his own long and absurd figure, and the unseen man with the cruel and evil voice, who, as Daniel told himself, had talked as no man had ever talked in his hearing before. Yes, he was not sorry he had not seen that man.

II

The experience of the wood became to Daniel part of that historical experience which is important in the lives of all of us—a newspaper file added to the library of our subconscious memory. It might never again be required by the mind which had recorded it; and so might be dead for ever. But should anything happen upon which that recorded hour might throw light, or to which that experience might be relevant, the record would spring at once into the immediately active mind again.

For the time being Daniel's mind was occupied with a personal anxiety. The poultry farm did not make progress.

Indeed, a distressful enterprise daily grew more so. He had an idea that his failure was known even to the birds themselves. They probably talked him over and signalled when he approached, "Here comes that sorry clown our owner and master. *He'll* never do us any good!"

Quite obviously, as he confessed to himself, the whole thing was "hibberdy hobberdy." And in Daniel's day such a business as his still lacked the help of organisers who were not afraid of using a little imagination in their work. Moreover, in that day the needs of a hungry city were more modest; for that same city could, with less trouble than to-day, feed itself with eggs and birds. The tradesmen whom the giant visited, and who had at first seemed to promise business, were inclined to treat him lightly when they were willing to treat with him at all. His odd, long, ungainly person and his lack of natural shrewdness amused them and provoked their contempt, while they lacked intuition to pierce to the genuine intellectual quality of this curious young man.

Whether his mother drew any conclusions as to the result of her investment of her money, Daniel could not be sure. He was careful to say nothing, and each day he hoped that trade would improve. His anxiety prevented him giving much thought to the pair he had overheard in the plantation.

In the meantime he had had no message from Mabel, and when three days had passed and still nothing had come, he began to be troubled. He hesitated to go over unbidden, for he had a notion that to do so would be to offend her—though she had professed readiness to see him again at any time.

Finally he wrote her a letter. He had never written to her before; and the writing of a first love-letter must be one of those great First Things of life the occasion of which a man, growing more forgetful every year, never fails to remember. The writing of it gave Daniel several hours of high excitement. He thought of phrases, set them down, went to his work again, and came back to his paper, with a new phrase that seemed better to celebrate her beauty. For this letter should be no mere request for a meeting.

He thought that she liked him to talk about her: she might also like him to write.

Whether she would reply he could not feel at all sure. Once the letter was in the box he began to experience alternations of feeling. He reproved his own temerity, then his expansiveness. She would have thought more of him if he had been content with a brief, clear message. Self-consciously he repeated to himself the phrases he had once thought so well of that he must needs write them down at once. Now he wondered how they read in her eyes. Would she impute to him a certain weakness, a soft feminine liking for emotional words? Would she call him what he had heard her call somebody, a "sloppy fool," or say that his talk was "all duller"?

And then the reply came. When the postman was in the lane, Daniel, on the watch, saw him and hurried out. The giant, in going, cast a hurried look at his mother, who was at her sewing. She had not noticed, he concluded, and went to meet the postman. If, meanwhile, the woman put down her work and raised herself so that she could look into the road, he did not know it.

He did not come back into the house, but made a business of beginning to clean one of his runs, and presently, with a delicious anticipation of he knew not what, he crept behind the poultry house, and, hesitant still, broke open the envelope. Here was her first letter—the first letter that any woman had sent him. How would she declare herself?

His first emotion was of disappointment that the letter was so short. He saw that it ended before the first side of one sheet had been filled. But it was stiff too. Written in her awkward and badly formed hand it told "Dear Daniel," that "you can come over Saturday if you like after dark. I'll meet you same as last time. But you're not to come to mine."

When he had considered it a little he was inclined to a gentle rebellion. He did not want to meet her after dark, and he wanted to be received in her home. However, he could only obey her behest and hope to persuade her to his wishes.

When Saturday came he had to tell his mother that he was going over to Stowe. His fear was that she would ask a question; but though she looked at him gravely, she asked nothing. Yet he went feeling guilty. For Mabel still signified the strongest influence which kept him from ever considering the possibility of accepting the showman's offer. Even if the poultry scheme ended in ruin he could not face the only step which would carry him into a position where he could support his mother. Her every look, therefore, reproached him; and, setting out, he hurried as from a terror. He had left home early. He could put in his time about Stowe until the hour appointed, and he reached the High Street a good hour before the time for the meeting.

As he entered the street, keeping to the dimmer side, for he did not want to be noticed (and Daniel had long learnt to avoid publicity), he came in sight of the "Stowe Arms," brightly lighted, and with men going in and out, one or two beginning to sing rather noisily. For a moment he paused, his eye caught by the only bright spot in this badly lighted street; and as he stood there, brought more under the beams of the tap-room light than he realised, he saw issuing from the door a fine figure of a man in a red coat—a noticeable fellow who caught the giant's eye, touched his heart, made him stop short. A soldier! thought the giant. But the soldier bore himself so splendidly that Daniel took a step forward into the roadway to look, and immediately afterwards found that he had contrived to bring himself within the scrutiny of a pair of eyes. He became aware of this at the same moment that he began to be troubled with the idea that the soldier was not unknown to him. The man, who wore the stripes of a corporal, and who seemed perfectly aware that he was a dashing figure, had raised his eyes to the giant. Daniel saw that he glanced at first rather idly, but that then he started, suppressed the start, and gazed with concentrated interest. This scrutiny was not amiable. The giant, indeed, became obscurely aware of its being in some way inimical. The soldier was looking him up and down with an easy contempt, but also with

something personal in the character of the observation. The thought crossed Daniel's mind that the corporal remembered him in Oldborne even though he had never seen the man before. More people knew Tom Fool than Tom Fool knew! At that thought Daniel, who had tried to resist the other's eyes, felt himself yielding to a pressure of contempt.

But making a final effort to return the other's scrutiny, it was his turn to start. He had dismissed the idea that he could have seen the soldier before, but now the thought returned that this was not their first meeting.

He began to search his mind. Where before had he seen that almost noble figure, that fine and haughty carriage, and that handsome face with its smiling eyes? He had not to search long. The memory came; and he saw himself crouching in the undergrowth of a plantation while he observed a young man in old, tight-fitting clothes.

Yes, the poacher, if poacher he had been, of that occasion was the corporal of to-night! Daniel had an impulse to speak, to demand an explanation. But the soldier, having studied him with undisguised disdain, turned easily from the door and began to move along the street towards the beach, while the giant, dismissed contemptuously from the other's observation, stood there filled with doubt and humiliation and envy, and that curious fear that had struck at him when he had first seen the man. This sensation of fear, which he had tried to deride, took possession of him so promptly that, with no deliberate intent, he followed the magnificent form moving before him. He could only explain his thus doing so by the force of fascination. The figure in front, whenever it emerged from a dim shadow and crossed the beam of a shop-window on its path, stood out glorious in its crimson dress. And in hesitating pursuit went the quivering giant until they were clear of the shops and were come to the path on the edge of the sea.

Here Daniel paused. But the same sense of being sickened with fear, and yet drawn forward in the soldier's wake, still possessed him; and when he had given the corporal but a few extra strides start, he set out to follow again.

His mind now trembled on the edge of a discovery, a discovery the character of which he had already identified with a lover's sick forebodings. His fears became now a sort of convulsive terror. In such a mood have most of us suddenly found ourselves being led down a narrow lane of experience to which, as we see it, there can be only one end. Yet we try to look another way, or believe that a miracle will open up an alternative path and a different issue.

The soldier had now disappeared in the darkness, but Daniel followed the sound of his footsteps. Presently the giant knew that they must be near the hut, and a new and startling idea broke upon his mind. He pushed it away and kept it off, but for long afterwards he found himself remembering the footsteps he had heard on the night of his first visit . . . remembering and comparing . . . and still those quick, sharply-striking feet marched before him. It occurred to the giant presently that his pursuit might be resented.

But in any case now it would be his part to halt, since, near at hand, there loomed, familiar and already strangely poignant with memory, a faint, dim vision of the hut.

From somewhere near at hand came the sound of the sea breaking on the beach—breaking upon it with little explosions of energy to-night, for the wind was rising. Indeed the whole aspect of the scene was changing quickly, as it does on this coast. The sky was flecked with heavy black clouds that moved with a growing speed as the storm drove them; and the wind itself, as it gathered force, spoke in many strange voices. The sound of the sea had become sullen and yet full of a hint of increasing power that might soon grow insolent; while the wind now began to moan about the hut, and presently to scream and make the boards shudder and rattle.

Somewhere near to where Daniel waited a flag, or something of the kind, flapped foolishly and irritatingly; and the whole of these noises united to make a disturbance in the giant's mind.

But for the moment he was only half conscious of these

sounds. His immediate attention was concentrated upon the space where, three hundred yards up the road, fell a beam from the windows of that little group of houses, in one of which was centred all his hopes.

He had by now come to a standstill. Near at hand loomed the shed which was his trysting-place. Up the road gleamed faintly the light of the windows, and in the darkness between, now scarcely to be heard, though still, as was to be supposed, going forward, marched the soldier. Daniel stood there waiting and watching and with every nerve a-tremble. The fear that before had oppressed him now clutched at his throat. He began to count, as if thus to carry himself through the next few minutes. Where went the soldier, that gay bird of ill omen? He felt the sweat gather on his forehead as he watched, sickened with dread.

And, as he waited, across the beam there cut suddenly the quick moving figure which he had learnt so quickly to know. He drew a deep breath, his eye strained to miss nothing, and he knew at once that the soldier had not gone by. There was a burst of light as a door opened; and then a reversion to the milder gleam of the window-light. The fearful suspicion aroused in Daniel's heart by his sheer appreciation of the soldier's splendour was confirmed. He had no sooner looked at the corporal than the thought came —first that against such a figure no man had a chance if challenged, and then that subtle, unreasoning conviction that the person to be challenged was not some other but himself.

The heart of the giant was now a heart dark with distress. He turned miserably to the hut. Should he wait now? Was it to be supposed that he was remembered? He was consumed with bitter jealousy and envy. What chance had a misshapen freak like himself against that splendid figure? What show could his drab and much-mended homespun make against the crimson and gilded glories of the Queen's uniform? And what comparison could his history of small doings at home (and unsuccessful doings at that) make against the achievements of a hero who, for all

he knew, had as a youngster a year or two before passed through the flame of the Mutiny in India? Yet there was a memory that went with yon soldier that mitigated the glory of the uniform.

Momentarily he could be distressed, not for himself, but for her. For that *was* the man. Suppose—but his tired egoism recovered itself. She did not want *him*. Yes, he would turn himself and retreat, for she could not need him to-night. He stood there in cruel disdain of himself; and while he stood the gale flung itself about him, screaming its angry passions and making for him now a music that he told himself presently, as his sense of desperation became more self-conscious, fitted his mood. He heard the roll of the sea, the sound of each great wave like the blow of some awful superhuman being trying to destroy; and he drew a breath in one of those tragic pauses which intervene between the arrival of one wave and the next, while in his heart he cried out for some Hand to descend and wipe out the whole universe in whose meshes he seemed to have been caught.

But as for that sea, was it not there to receive him? It, at least, was dealing fairly, offering its freedom to a freak, a giant, a figure of fun, as readily as to the wearer of the uniform. To each it extended the same gift of escape. Escape? *Was* that a way of escape? Into what world of dreadful shadows was the sea but the narrow passage?

He suddenly recalled himself. This was weakness. This was folly. What a poltroon was here who, because into the house of his sweetheart an unknown soldier had been seen entering, was ready to surrender everything! Probably the soldier was to her a nobody. And yet was that to be thought? Did not the soldier enter boldly where *he*, the giant, dared not go? How had the soldier licence to do what *he* was strictly forbidden to do? The accepted lover, it seemed, must wait humbly by the shed though the storm gathered. She must know the wind was rising, and that the shed offered poor shelter. Probably she would refuse to sit there with him to-night. But she made no effort to rescue him. She did not bid him to come under her

roof. She left him there while she enjoyed her hour with that popinjay, that blackguard in red.

Three and four times the giant told himself that he would go, and three and four times he came to a halt again and looked up the lane. He had done this many times but still remained, and when a good half-hour had passed, he caught his breath to see the door again open. Evidently the soldier was about to depart. But it was not the soldier who came forth, but a figure that he knew at once was that of the girl for whom he had been waiting. He had done her an injustice! All his doubts were swept instantly from his mind: his heart beat with excitement and anticipation.

She was coming! And now all the noises of the night became an orchestra deeply and splendidly welcoming his love, filling the universe with the echoes of her fame. Sea and sky and wind told him that she came, and told not him alone, but carried her name to the remotest planet.

It could only be she. He had such a conviction of this that he scarcely troubled to look again, nor did he seek to discover whether the soldier had left the house after her. He knew that she came alone, and came to him: that she was keeping her tryst.

He called when he heard her step close: he called through the noisy darkness; and she answered. The next moment he had found her in the night, seized her arm, made her his.

"To think you 'ud come through such a noight as this," he murmured in the ecstasy born of re-established confidence.

"Yes. It wore rale good of me, woren't it?"

"Yes, dear, it wore." But, as had happened before, her mood brought down his mounting spirit—brought it nearly to the earth where she stood always so securely.

"But it wore no night for you. I mean I cannot ask you to sit with me here in this here place——"

"Why not?" she asked sharply. "Don't you want to talk to me?"

"You know I do. But the noight——"

"The noight? What's wrong with the noight? It be windy and rafty. But it ain't cold. It be such a noight as I like. But I can go home if——"

"You know I don't mean that," he said, taking her by the arm more firmly. "I—I love to have you here—or anywhere. Some day you'll let me come home with you." A sudden memory of the soldier smote him, and he nearly added, "Take me home as you do that red-coat with his swagger." But he checked himself, though now he was newly oppressed by the thought of that uniformed intruder upon his happiness.

"Shall we sit where we sat afore?" he asked her as he led her towards the hut.

"Why not?" she parried. And so he took her through the night. They went a little stumblingly, but found a partly sheltered spot and sat down.

He sought to draw her closer. "It be won'erful to have you near me like this and yet to feel that all about us is the shouting night. Not but what it seem to me to be tellin' all the world about—about——"

"Yes?" She seemed to recognise his mood.

"About how beautiful you are and how won'erful-like. Whilst I was waiting I looked up and listened to the storm. And that be what I thought it were saying—telling me and telling that great black sky and that sea that we can hear now—telling all that you were coming and that you was so beautiful and all. You bain't afraid of the storm, dear, are you? You're not frit, I mane, now that"—forcing his hesitant manhood—"well, now that you've got *me?*"

"Frit? I'm not frit, you or no you. Though I'm not likely to be less frit because you're here. I mean to say——"

For that was, she saw, merely clumsy. But her correction was too late.

"Then you don't want me here?" For the first time the giant spoke with the faintest note of anger. She may have questioned with herself whether to punish it, or submit, and decided on the second course, for she said:

"Now you're being unfair, giant," she began softly. "I

mane Daniel. I wouldn't ask you to meet me if I didn't want to see you, would I now?"

As a rule that kind of tender logic easily overcame him; but to-night, having been rendered critical and having, as he thought, discovered success in his putting out a hand for himself, he had it on the end of his tongue to challenge her about the soldier.

But when he considered it the enterprise alarmed him. Suppose she were to turn from him and, leaving him there, rush into the arms of that man? The fellow might still be as near as her home. So Daniel contented himself with feeble and disguised thrusts.

"I dessay you'd not say to me what you'd say to some folk." Mild though the challenge was, he was himself astonished at what seemed to him its directness.

"Likely not. I don't let everybody come here to talk along o' me."

"No, I don't mane it that way. I meant it t'other way. You'd tell some folk ef they was sitting by you that you didn't feel frit with *them* alongside o' you, them being big and——"

"They couldn't be much bigger'n the chap I've got sittin' agin me to-night."

He didn't know whether to think of it as a sneer, for she could be subtle enough when she chose. He always a little suspected her cleverness. But he judged he had better accept the words on their face value.

His first attempt to challenge her had broken down. He drew her close to him and began to tell his love again, she answering with her little thick-spoken monosyllables.

III

She continued soft and conciliatory. But he had to leave her without having extracted consent for another meeting, and certainly with none for a visit to her home.

"But you've taken me for your man," he had pleaded (all the impulse to challenge was out of him by this).

"No matter." She paused, and it seemed to him that

she chose her words. "I can't do what you ask—no yet."

And he had to leave her with that refusal on her lips. But he whistled as he went home. For the main thing was that her refusal was only of admission to her father's house. And parents were known to be hard to maidens that bestowed their hearts. He had not dared challenge her about the red-coat. But that fellow had not prevented her from coming to keep her tryst. He would not allow the popinjay to trouble his thoughts.

The giant whistled against the noise of the wind, which still rose and would presently be a hurricane. He felt the night full of sound and adventure. This was surely to ride the storm. Your heart rose upon the night wind, even as a strong swimmer rose upon the high swell. The giant sang; he lifted his eyes to the stars appearing and disappearing behind the rising black clouds and singing their replies as God gave them utterance. In his shrill, thin voice the giant called out challenges. To-night, as before, the girl had bidden him leave her in the lane and he had done so. Once, as he turned away from the beach road, he had looked back. But he saw only night, and far away a flickering light from the window that he knew so well. She must be behind that window now. As for the soldier, the giant in this new mood continued now to discount all thoughts of the soldier. The fellow, he decided, was merely a lodger, or perhaps a relation. Indeed what certainty had he that the popinjay had entered the Hathages' and not the house next door? In any case, what mattered any of these speculations when the girl had promised herself to him—Daniel Windmill? He went on his way, vividly and passionately aware of her late nearness to himself: he still felt her little warm hands, scented her fragrance, caught the thrilling echo of her little, thick voice as it defeated the storm.

CHAPTER X

DANIEL waited, as he had waited before, for the next summons to meet Mabel. But none came. And he was forbidden to go unless invited. In the meantime another anxiety became active. The poultry enterprise, that melancholy experiment, was quite plainly not going to succeed. In his day there was a smaller demand for what he could supply. Every man who chose could command land enough to keep fowls; and if gifted with a deaf ear for the egotistic clamour of cock and hen, and a blind eye to the disorder of a poultry run, he did choose. Thus Daniel was really a little previous. The Gippeswick shopkeepers to whom he went with his eggs and poultry gave him shorter shrift than ever. Some of them openly derided him. He looked so odd and ungainly a figure, and he did his business with so little natural shrewdness, that they made a sad fool of him. All this his sensitive soul discovered at once. He had received most consideration from one Samuel Sadd, a grocer, who also conducted a poulterer's business. This man had come originally from Oldborne, where he had known Daniel's father. "For the sake of you being your father's son, Oi'll take what Oi can take." So he had declared, and till now he had acted up to his declaration.

One bright autumn morning Daniel set off in the creaking bus over the lumbering road and through the yellow moor to Gippeswick. He told himself that he ought to walk there, but he knew that he had not the strength for carrying such a burden as his over a distance of six miles. A man might talk heroically of the enterprise of carrying two heavy baskets the distance; but that was not to perform the task. He agreed with himself, therefore, to travel by bus even though it depleted his small profits.

In the glistening lane, with its sweet wet walls of leaf and berry, Daniel waited, a long, lean, melancholy object. His heart did not respond to the bright energy of the day's youth that was made manifest in air and tree. He was thinking of Mabel. He had not seen her for a fortnight; and, though he had written twice, he had had but one small, sharp note saying brusquely, "Can't get out to meet you this week. Mother's ill and I've got to see to her. Will write when can get out."

There had been no second letter. Had the poultry business only begun to show signs of success he might have found confidence to go uninvited to her father's house and force his way in; but could one who was a failure, as well as a freak, dare such an enterprise? He thought not.

He began to think of his mother. He still kept his secret from her. Indeed, as he believed, he kept most things from her in those days. He had said little about the result of the gamble with her money except to give easy, confident, and superficial answers to any questions she chose to ask. Not that she had ever asked many, and for the last week or two she had been silent. Evidently he had at last satisfied her.

But so far as his own mind went he tried to keep the truth before him. His birds were doing ill. His best had died: two others were sick: a dog had killed his second-best Cochin China; and he could not get the market for such produce as he had to offer. The prices he was being offered now did not pay for the corn he used.

Standing there this morning, Daniel made a long, black and rather absurd line against the gay landscape. In this way he may have impressed the driver of the long, iron-tyred bus with its hard and straight-backed, leather-upholstered seats, which now came up to the edge of Oldborne High Street to collect passengers. The bus, which had started from Stowe, had already three passengers, two women within and a man on the box, a small, fat man, who sat up straight, as small, fat men do, in an effort to make a fair figure beside his slimmer companion. The driver was a man in middle life, with a ruddy face, decorated with close-cropped side whiskers and small, lively, blue eyes.

"Yonder," said the driver whom the world knew as "Doddery" and nothing else, save perhaps "Dod," "yonder be our giant. He always go with us in these times. He be a farmer now—no less. Poultry. See his baskets? And he done nawthen before. Couldn't. But he bain't a proper farmer, poor feller. Oh no," with unctuous assurance, "he bain't no proper farmer."

"Oh," said the little man, a stranger and a commercial gent, who had been over in the hope of inducing Stowe to be interested in the new sewing-machines that were becoming all the rage. He spoke in a high piping tone and pinched his words. "Oh, and why *isn't* he a proper farmer?"

"'Cause he ain't never grumbled out loud, not in my hearing," said Doddery. "Now I've been a-driving of this here liddle ole bus for twenty year, and afore that I wore horseman on the farm you'll see over yonder ten minutes from now. Well, so I've knowed farming folk all my born, and I've learnt that every proper farmer grumble at the rain, at the sun, at his vittals, at his men, at his money, and at last because there's nawthen to grumble about."

"And this young man," whispered the commercial, for they were now within Daniel's hearing, "never grumbles?"

"Not that I know of. His mother ought to grumble—but, no, she don't, spite o' settin' all day and night too stitchin' away——"

"What!" The commercial gentleman, who had been taking a strictly academic interest in this exposition of the anatomy of a farmer's melancholy, suddenly became again a thinker, strictly in terms of his own trade. "Is his mother a dressmaker, did you say?"

"Well, yes, that's what she be," answered the driver, "bain't she, Daniel?" This to the giant, who, having bestowed his merchandise upon the carrier fixed to the roof, considered where he should sit, the box-seat being apparently occupied. He looked within the bus, but Doddery, reading his thought, broke in.

"No, you'd better get up here. Never get that neck of yourn inside. We'd have to raise the roof another couple o' yards."

Daniel winced, and then tried to smile. But the commercial had, by this, conceived a plan. He was hastily pushing his small person nearer to Doddery and piping out amiably, "Plenty of room, sir, plenty of room." When one proposed business one always said "sir."

Mystified and pleased, Daniel smiled, and began clambering up. No one had ever before called him "sir"; and here was a gentleman with a gold ring and a gold watch-chain addressing him. It was difficult to understand. . . .

But ere these two had parted at Gippeswick, Daniel understood. Still he could not regret the order for the sewing-machine which he had signed, when he remembered what he owed his mother.

It was Daniel's practice to go first to Sadd's because there he could count on disposing of half his stock. It occurred to him to-day how much depended on Samuel Sadd. For already, one by one, the other men who had professed to help him by doing business had refused to give him more than a price which returned him no profit whatever on his expenditure. However, there was always Sadd, and on the business done with that good customer Daniel relied to-day for the money to pay his now pressing accounts for feeding-stuffs. Also, now, there would be the first instalment of the sewing-machine!

He was determined not yet to surrender in the hope that things would take a turn; and he arrived opposite Sadd's, whistling. Yes, so long as he had Sadd, he need not fear the worst.

But at Sadd's door he was met with a difficulty. The shop had not yet opened. Consulting a church clock he saw that it was the hour of ten. He noticed too that all the other shops were open.

He therefore looked in at the open window of the butcher's next door.

"Is Mr. Sadd . . ." he began.

"Mr. Sadd?" answered the blotchy-faced butcher, eyeing the inquirer with unkindly curiosity and obviously trying to get a measurement. "Mr. Sadd won't want to

do any business with you to-day if that's what you're after."

"And why not?" asked the giant.

"Because of a very good reason," said the butcher with heavy satisfaction; "because he's dead."

"Dead?" cried Daniel.

"Yes. Haven't I said it, Mr. Longshanks? Want me to spell it?"

"No, no. Dead! Sars o' mine! I do a bit o' business with him, you know. And he's dead! Well, I be very sorry."

"Yes, he's dead right enough. And—I say, young man, what might be your height, now?"

But Daniel did not heed. He merely went away. He knew that the death of Sadd removed his best customer. Moreover, Sadd had found him other customers. But the man who took over Sadd's business happened to be one of those other shopkeepers who had laughed at and cheated the giant before. And when Daniel had made two more visits to Gippeswick, and brought back so poor a recompence as to make a third visit a mere vexation, he knew that the "poultry farm" was definitely a failure.

He knew this very well as he sat opposite his mother at the tea-table in the little kitchen of their cottage with the poor, polished things catching the light. He tried to appear at ease, but he was aware all the time that she observed him furtively. He began to be suspicious that she watched him; that she sometimes looked out upon him as he worked in the garden, trying to assess the value, not so much of what was to be seen in stock, as the value of the work being done. There are some people whose aspect suggests a sort of instinct for futility. It displays itself curiously in a kind of withdrawing of the muscles of the face, a narrowing and primming of the lips; and for long the giant had been oppressed by a conviction that his mother did not believe in him or his enterprise.

But there was a matter of immediate consequence to his mother. The commercial traveller had told Daniel that so great was the demand for the new sewing-machines that

orders could only be filled in rotation. Daniel had heard of crops and so understood. Then in something over a fortnight there was to be seen one morning a man with a red beard, known for miles around to be the beard of the carrier. This man was observed coming up the path leading to the Windmills' cottage; making his way through that scene of spent hopes, the garden in which were disposed Daniel's poultry runs.

Daniel did not at first observe what was happening; he was employed inside the oldest of the fowl-houses, which happened to be nearest the house. But he heard a movement of heavy feet, and was curious enough to turn about and come to the door. What he now saw was the carrier offering a large package, done up in brown paper and with wood supports, which Mrs. Windmill was refusing. He could even overhear the form of her refusal.

"That fare to be some mistake."

"But there be the name—Windmill," argued the man.

"That fare to be some mistake, carrier, all the same. I've not ordered nawthen, and there be nobody that send to me. So you'd——"

"I—I can explain, mother," Daniel thrust from the run and came across, to the plain relief of the carrier.

"That," Daniel tore off a shred of the paper cover, "that 'll be all right. That's what I order."

"*What* did you order?" she demanded.

"I order—I order what you see there," said Daniel. "That be a sewing-machine."

She stared at him as if struck. "A *what?*" Really he might have planned something deliberately to injure her. Her face was pale with shock as well as astonishment, as if she had found him out in a plot, a falseness to herself. But suddenly she remembered that a strange man was looking on in some curiosity, and that this was strictly a family affair, a matter too much concerned with deep and secret emotions for this stranger to have a right of inspection.

"That's all roight, carrier," she said, coldly eyeing him now, as if she found his remaining there quite inexplicable. "My son, he know all about it. So I'll sign your paper."

The carrier held out the sheet for the receipt to be signed. He did so now with a mixture of resentment and self-complacency, for he was perfectly conscious of his dismissal, while at the same time he was aware of having at last carried conviction. He went off in offence and triumph.

The woman turned to her son, looking at him in a bleak, curiously non-maternal way. She was not angry, nor even critical. She seemed to regard him merely as a phenomenon.

This strange thing which she had borne, not content with growing up, had taken to presenting her with sewing-machines. She had never seen a sewing-machine; but she had heard rumours of them. There had been times when she had wondered whether she would not one day buy one, with something withdrawn from her hoard. And now the thing was here, in her possession, and here when her hoard was gone. But her mind had been made up, from the first.

"We can't afford it. That 'll have to go back."

"No. And besides, mother, I signed a paper."

"All the same, that 'll have to go."

She saw his face fall, his face that a moment before had glowed as it had not done for many days; and still she insisted, knowing that she hurt him and discouraged him, and knowing, too, that she longed at that very moment to be tearing away the cover and trying the new toy.

But this woman, with her queer, obscure, fakir-like spirit, with its suspicion of self-satisfactions, held with iron firmness to her resolve.

The sewing-machine was returned in due course, with a letter explaining that the payments could not be maintained. This, Daniel woefully admitted to himself, was more or less true. It did not occur to him, however, that his mother's reason for refusing the machine was wonderfully compounded of many other motives than that the money was short. He did not know the chill satisfaction, which came to her sometimes, because she had punished herself both directly in refusing the aid of this modern helper, and indirectly and yet more severely in snubbing her son who wished to make her a gift. It became an agreed thing that this sewing-machine was never to be spoken of; but sometimes

in the little kitchen at night she would look across at his moon face, high up above her, and remind herself that he did not know that her heart was still sore that she had denied herself that aid. Perhaps, already, she began to wonder whether, presently, even her endurance must give out, and she must make some sort of surrender.

CHAPTER XI

I

SO far her objection to the sewing-machine had been the only actual indication which Mrs. Windmill had given to Daniel of her conviction that his enterprise was a sorry failure. She still said nothing, but he knew, now that he had reached the conviction that the game was up, that she had forestalled him. If, and when, he confessed to her the fact, he would have no discovery to make to her. If she would own to any kind of surprise it must be to one that he had been able to keep going as long as he had. His abject and immediate surrender over the sewing-machine must have told her that he had nothing coming in, and no hope now of improvement. He began to tell himself that he ought to speak. But how much to tell her—that was the problem. He would not confess his whole heart and he resolved that, at least when the matter was first introduced, he would not reveal all.

He waited several days, and then one night after supper, following some irresolute standing about and many furtive glances towards where his mother sat, apparently absorbed in her work, he began :

" You mind that money, mother——"

" Money ? "

She raised her head, as if she drew herself with an effort out of her absorption in her sewing, to give heed to his talk, and as if she must first discover a clue to his mind.

" Yes, the money I borrowed o' you."

" Well ? "

" Well, things do not go well. Perhaps you guessed——"

He had tried to keep hints from reaching her. But he had not been ignorant of her surveillance.

"I didn't know a great deal of what you wore a-doin'," she said doggedly.

"Still you must have seen I looked a bit down in the mouth when I come back from market. Now didn't I?"

"Well, p'r'aps you did." She was still determinedly tentative, and she seemed to take her true mind to cover with her as she buried her needle in the cloth held below the lamp. He thought it was all like talking to a Judgment.

"Things bain't bought—and that be a fact, mother. I just thought I'd better give you a hint. In case——" He had not fully intended to add that subjunctive note. It gave her an opportunity which, however, she did not use. She did not, for instance, say "in case——" as if she asked a question and invited him to answer by filling in a gap. Her refusal was characteristic—a sort of continence, a puritanical withholding of herself from satisfying what ought to have been a natural curiosity. She merely waited for him to continue.

"Well, mother, the fact is, I *might*, I only say *might*, have to be a-lookin' out for suffen else." He stopped, trying to look at her. He wished that he had the calm and detachment necessary to examine her carefully and with real determination.

"If you have to find suffen else," she said, "I be a-wonderin' what it will be."

No reproaches, not even an allusion to her savings that had been lost—merely an intelligent speculation. She might equally have said, "I wonder if it will be fine when you go down to Gippeswick to-morrow."

He looked at her now quite fearfully. She must have mysterious qualities of which he knew nothing. He did not know how to approach her. He felt remote from her, as if he could not establish communication. Her absorption in her work had become something so subtle as utterly to challenge his understanding. But he felt, too, a need to maintain his position, although in attempting to do so he had a curious conviction of being an amateur.

"Of course I'm only puttin' the worst before you. Things mayn't be so bad as I've told you."

"Yes."

He didn't know what that monosyllable portended. But the effect of it was to leave him struggling the more ineffectually. In the end he retired. It seemed the only thing to do.

That night he lay with his eyes staring into the blackness. His mother's reception of his news was quite incomprehensible. But, freed from the dominating effect of her silence, he had leisure to consider the matter all round. And now certain facts became clear. Duty absolutely commanded that he should find other employment. But who else would employ him? He met that challenge bravely. There remained but one employer who could so reward him that he could rescue his mother. For now he began to consider her in the character of one whose "rescue" was imperatively necessary. He had been too much impressed by her manner in relation to himself and his confession of failure to note at the time her obvious attitude of weariness and of yielding to the hard demands of cruel time. But in retrospect he saw her as she had sat there, breathing hard, once sitting back involuntarily with her hand to her heart; and, always, thoughts of the heavy eyes, the hollow temples, the pinched cheeks had the effect of a chorus. Rescue was demanded and "rescue" was the word to express the action required of him. He must rescue her, and he must rescue her at once. If he did not, she would soon not be here to be rescued.

But rescue was only possible if the money he earned was sufficient to spare her continuing with this toil. Her action over the sewing-machine told him that she would not allow of any relief for herself while the money was short. So he was brought face to face once more with the fact, never now to be evaded, that only one means offered of providing the necessary money.

Instantly now his mind left his mother and went out to Mabel. Suppose, to serve his mother, he took the only offer that promised an income, how could he hope to hold the girl for a day? He could hear her derision, could even frame the sharp, cruel words with which she would free herself from

her engagement to a freak. Even as it was, she could only meet him when she need not be seen with him. She had insisted that their walks together must be taken in the woods or in the darkness. Some day, he convinced himself, he would have weaned her from sheer disrelish of himself. He would, he told himself fondly and often, have taught her so to love him that she would care nothing for the fact that he was somewhat in excess of an average man's length. But now was no time to assume that he had led her into such a state that she could be trusted to accept him whatever publicity attached to him. If she heard that he had become a public exhibition, she would turn from him at once, and with an air of intolerance which he could imagine; and that imagined, already gave him moments of intense anguish.

One thing at least he would do: in the morning he would once more make an attempt to find work. He would walk into Gippeswick and seek there what Oldborne could not offer. But if *this* essay failed . . . It must not fail . . . must not . . . even if he hung on the doorstep of every business man in Suffolk, it must not be allowed to fail. Failure meant denial—denial of Mabel for ever. He saw her standing in her tender, pink beauty before him, soft and desirable; and he ground his teeth. Ah! if he had been as other men! What a lover then would he have made! She did not understand; she could not understand, and none could understand, that he was mentally as others, and that he could feel as few men, indeed, felt or *could* feel. He was the potential lover made futile by his consciousness of his physical disability. He was the lover, with the thought of the lover. Who else could interpret sea and sky in terms of passion as his heart interpreted them? Even *she* recognised some quality in him which he could have defied her, if he had dared, to find in any other of the men she had met.

And in spite of these special powers that were his, he must fail, he must surrender, he must be made absurd. She had hidden from herself, as in relation to her he had almost succeeded in doing, the fact that he was not as other men. He was merely a big man; and a big man was somebody whom you could both admire and claim for your defender.

But a big man did not imply at all an abnormally big man. . . . Now, however, the fact of his size was to be obtruded : he was to be separated from his kind, stigmatised a Freak.

Well, the thing simply could not be. He must at all costs, and *now*, find employment.

Probably the sheer irony of life never impressed the giant as it did on that day of his final search for work. For going into an office in Gippeswick, to the office of a house and land agent, who had just put up a notice in his window, " Young man wanted," Daniel found the good man ready to listen. A Scot from Ayr, who had left home at seventeen, but who still felt an exile in East Anglia, he said he would see the visitor. MacMurdock was a thin-faced man with shrewd eyes and reedy side-whiskers, who had a habit of stroking first one and then the other as he reflected ; and he examined the giant not unfavourably, though with a little curiosity and even astonishment.

" All I want is a man to learn to carry things and take down figures and so on when we go out, and answer the door when I'm in." He paused and looked at the giant again. " There's plenty of ye anyhow."

" Yes," answered Daniel shamefacedly. " I'm sorry, but——"

" Oh, don't trouble yourself. Ye'd be none the worse for length, that is if ye ken your work——"

" Well—well, sir, I'm afraid I don't reckon to know——"

" You *don't ?* You mean that you've not been employed with a man in my line before ? Then what d'ye mean——"

" In coming to you ? It be like this. . . . I see your notice and I'm in a small bother." He considered whether to tell the man the whole story. But he knew enough of life to be aware that no man welcomes another who speaks the accent of failure.

" I'm in a bit of a worry, I've come for to say. I've had an easy life, taken things easily. Had a little money and——" He waved a hand, knowing that a man with a little money is never wholly despicable. " But my mother she's a-gittin' on in years and I want to better mysel' so as I can fend her against the future."

"Very praiseworthy, I'm sure. Only I don't see——" He paused, and the giant was suddenly aware of being seriously considered. Instantly, and in some excitement, he tried to discover what part he should play.

But MacMurdock interrupted his thoughts. "I don't see that ye'd be any good to me. But I'm wanting a man——"

"Yes." The giant, who had been sitting crouching in his chair, suddenly sprang up and perhaps emphasised too sharply the fact of his height, for the land agent was now peering up at him. The change in the physical attitude of the one may have involved some change in the mental attitude of the other.

"You'll give me a trial," cried Daniel in his thin, eager treble.

"Well, I don't know. What can you do?" and MacMurdock asked a few questions. He asked them a little doubtfully, but not so doubtfully as to discourage the hopes of the applicant, who answered the inquiries as confidently as he could.

"H'm. I don't feel very sure. As I say, I could perhaps find ye something. Yes. Ye look honest and intelligent, young man. And if I give you a trial it'll save me advertising in the newspaper."

"Thank you, sir—thank you, indeed."

Daniel could scarcely control his delight: at last he was to be a clerk earning good money in a gentlemanly way.

He only wished Mabel could overhear this interview. No longer would she refuse to admit him to the house. He knew enough of her condition to be sure that a land agent's clerk would be considered a person of some standing in the society of her parents.

"Thank you kindly, sir. I'm won'erful grateful. That job 'll jest suit me——"

"Wait a minute, young man," said the prospective employer a little drily. "You're going too fast. I can employ ye—yes. But you were telling me just now about your object in getting employment."

"Yes, sir, that's won'erful particular. I must have enow to keep my mother comfortable, and now——"

"Now—that's what we're coming to. That's the crux of this affair, young man. If you come here you *won't* have enough—see?"

"Won't have enow, sir? I don't reckon that——"

"You understand? Well, I'll have to make it a bit clearer, that's all," and he stroked his right whisker. "I might give you a job, as I've said; but mark this, I'd be doing you a kindness."

"Yes, sir, oh, sartainly, you do be doin' that, sir."

"I mean," and now he stroked his left whisker, "I'd be doing you a kindness by giving you the job as an education, so to speak."

"I do not quite see even yet, sir——"

"Then I'll put it blunt. I couldn't pay you anything for six months, and then only a few shillings, because not for a couple of years would you be any good to me."

The giant's face had turned very white. He felt sick, sick with the bitterest disappointment. But he tried to hold himself.

"You mean that you'd pay me—pay me later."

"Oh, that would depend. I couldn't make promises. All would hinge on how you turned out. But in the meantime I'd have taught you a business and you'd be fit to take a job elsewhere; or, if I had the work to offer you, to take a properly paid situation with me."

"And you think there do be a chance of that?"

The question came haltingly. The giant was now like a bird with a broken wing that still moves forward. Already the shadow of duty was cast across the path which a few minutes before had blazed with light before him.

"Oh, there'd be more'n a chance. But you'd not be earning any income—I'm being quite plain with ye—for five years at least. I'm a business man, and business men can't afford to be generous. After the five years, if you were not any use to me it would be your own fault."

"I see, sir." Daniel half choked as he made that acknowledgment of the other's frankness. "I'd—I'd like to have a little time to think. You see, sir, a good deal hang on this."

"Well," said this Scottish exile, "ye can have till to-morrow to think if ye like. Young man, don't be rash! If it wasna for this business of yer mother, I'd say, I think quite honestly, come here and try. I like the looks of you—even if there's a good deal too much of you in the shanks and neck. But that's no fault of yours. Yes, now, if you'd a lass in view instead of a mither to think aboot, I'd say come here. And when you're old enough to marry, why I'd do what I could for ye. But I dinna pay without value received."

"No, sir. I wouldn't want you to do that," said the poor giant, though that was precisely what he *would* have liked the agent to do.

"Then you'd better be off home to talk it over with the mither."

"Yes, sir, and thank you. You've made me a fair offer and I'll give my mind to thinkin' of it," and with that he went out and began to walk back; and as he went in his new deep oppression he wondered whether he could not have been happier if this man had said him nay from the outset. For though he went with twenty-four hours' allowance for consideration, he knew ere he had quitted the agent's room, ere even the man had stopped speaking, what must be done.

Quite simply, quite clearly, the law was written: he must choose between his mother and Mabel; and he was not even free to choose as his heart bade him. He was almost within doors before the new thought that was to animate him with returning hope came to him. But as he approached the scene of his lost enterprise and considered it with melancholy eye, the thought pressed that he must tell his mother not only about MacMurdock, but about the offer of the other man—that offer that involved degradation.

Still, when his mother heard of this offer which, for so long, he had hidden from her, she would denounce it. If he knew her at all she would hate it so much that she would positively forbid him to accept, and then his conscience would be free. He had spent her money—yes, and was morally bound to her. She alone could free him from the obligation to use the only means which offered to procure

him a regular income. But she could free him at once. And if he understood her she would not only do so, but do so in such a way that he would feel that, in persisting, he would be acting against her dearest wish.

The thought of this promised release gave him a new confidence. He would now think of MacMurdock's offer, see himself accepting it, discover himself a year or two hence, a man with a gentlemanly occupation, whom Mabel was glad to know and whom her parents were ready to welcome to their house.

Coming in upon his mother he whistled shrilly, so that she looked up rather sharply. It struck him that she still sat where he had seen her the night before. It gave him a pang to think that if he accepted MacMurdock's offer his mother would still have to sit there. But he hurriedly told himself that he would be able so to raise her station by his own advancement that she would be consoled for that little extra toil. He told himself this thing furtively, however, and then plunged into talk, for there was this matter of the showman to be dealt with. He must first get the freedom that she would, he knew, so vehemently bestow.

"You seem purty lively," she had said after a short, sharp scrutiny. He thought she sounded a little irritable. But then she did not know his good news.

"Lively? Yes, mother. But p'r'aps for once I've got a reason."

Now her scrutiny became concentrated. "Oh, indeed," she said, and seemed to wait.

"Yes, mother. You didn't think when you see me go off this morning that I wore going to find suffen to do in place of the farm—that, in plain words, I got a plan in my head."

"You often have plans, bor."

"Yes, but this wore a *special* plan." He felt a little discouraged. But then, of course, she did not know what he was about to tell her.

"I went out on a journey this morning."

It seemed to him that she started as if with fear; but that was absurd.

"A journey? Where did you go to? Over to Stowe?"
How sharp the words sounded.
"Nay, Gippeswick."
It was impossible to miss her note of relief.
"Who was it?"
"It was that Mr. MacMurdock."
"He be the man that let the houses?" Yes, she had certainly recovered from some effect utterly inexplicable.
"Yes, that be the man," he agreed, "and I put it to him that I were after a job and he be goin' to give me one."
He was half rewarded. He saw her face relax; but its muscles grew tauter again as she put a question.
"You'd have to live there?"
"I don't know. That would have to be settled."
"And I do not see what you could do for him," she resumed, "seeing that you've never been learned his trade. But I suppose if he like to pay you a good wage every week——"
"Wait a minute, mother." He spoke quickly, but with a noticeable loss of confidence. It was evidently beginning to occur to her, Daniel told himself, that she was to have a son who would be a clerk and a gentleman. But too quickly was she counting on the immediate income. She must be made to understand the true position.
"I hain't told you all yet," he went on. "He'll have me. He promise that, and"—trying a lighter note—"that do be the main thing, bain't it? To git on the road to fortune, eh? But there do be just this about it. He can't pay—yet. He say I must first learn to be useful before he can afford to pay. That be reasonable enough, o' course."
"Oh, yes, that do be reasonable enough." She spoke in a curiously flat voice now that betrayed nothing of her real feeling. "So long as you——" she seemed to peer long at him as she said the words, and he looked down, asking himself if she could be consciously challenging him, "as you get a good wage in six months from now——"
"He—he say he won't be able to give me that amount in quite that time."

"Oh, he won't?" She was still scrutinising him with that same relentlessness.

"No, mother, I'm feared not. But"—trying to maintain the light note—"it do be a case of needs must. The poultry, I'm afeard, means allus a-loosin'. From that there bain't no escape. Well—and what else do there be? This man's offer, which be a won'erful good offer looked at all round, and mindin' what 'll come at the last, or"—and now he hurried on, for the words must be spoken at whatever cost—"failin' that there'd be nawn but a job that you'd never want me to touch, I know, a job that I never loiked to tell you I'd been offered. But you've got to hear just to let you see that it's MacMurdock or nawthen. Well, now, a man he come to me a long time ago, mother—a showman he wore. He give me his address and all. And he say he'd take me in a show that he have. Yes, mother, he want your son to stand up and be gaped at by crowds. He say I wore a big man, a sight to see; that if I exercise I could pull myself out further, and that with high heels to my boots as well and with constant pullin' out of myself, I'd be the tallest man in England before long, and that I wore to begin at once." He stopped suddenly. His eye had reached her face for the first signs of alarm or disrelish, and he could not see them. All that came was a question in the same flat voice:

"What did he say he'd pay?"

The giant stared down at her. He had heard the words, he had even *seen* them. There they were hanging across the room like a portent, while he tried, all ineffectively, to assimilate their lesson. There are such times for most of us, when the actual words of our speech seem to be projected pictorially. In them there is, of course, a clue to the cause of the appeal which they produce. They are powerful enough to fix on the mind a picture of some immense consequence translated into actual form. And by some odd trick of our human mind the pictorial quality inherent in the event is communicated to words that, taking shape, merely stand at the opening to a path of action without seeming to disclose a yard of the way.

And the giant had heard, yet had not answered, so that again she put her question in the same flat voice with her head still bent. Did she realise that every moment in which her aspect continued to be what it was, contributed to the character of a situation made inevitably tragic by the moral consciousness of her son?

"What do he say he'd pay?"

"Three pound a week and all found." His voice seemed to himself to be a mere croak. It was preposterous that he should be answering her or that he should have been asked such a question at all.

Late that night the giant searched for the envelope on which he had recorded an address. He wanted to confirm it. Yet, as he knew, the confirmation was unnecessary. For from the first moment that address had been written in his heart.

With the address before him he sat down and laboriously wrote the letter.

Well, he had done his duty to his mother, if not to his manhood.

II

What would Mabel say? He refused to face that question until his letter was written and in the post. And to make quite certain that the vision of her did not dart in between him and final action, when he knew his mother was abed he came downstairs again on tiptoe, and, lifting the latch, he stole out with his letter. He must post it now. He had to walk a quarter of a mile to the village, but if he did not act at once the thought of Mabel would thrust that of his mother from his mind, and the letter would be torn up. Oh yes, he knew his own frailty. Even now the vision of that girl was pursuing him. Once, in his alarm, he began to run.

It was a still night of stars. He looked up into the face of that vast scene with its aspect of immovable, imperishable splendour. Not to-night could he feel that the whole universe marched in step with his own long legs! He turned his eyes down again; resumed his odd run, came to the post

office and then, for one moment, balanced the letter on the lip of the box. And he saw his future hanging, like that letter, upon a balance. The ultimate moment of decision was reached.

He released the letter, heard it fall within, turned and hurried home. And upon this poor, obedient spirit, encased in its odd contraption of a body, the good stars looked down, and, though he knew it not, marched with him still.

CHAPTER XII

IN the morning he wrote to Mabel: said he would be over that night and would call: that the matter was very important as, for some time, he might not be able to see her again; and that therefore he must visit her at once.

He would, he knew, have to call at her house. But he did not mind. It was unfair of her ever to have objected to his calling. She had made him her man, and she should have allowed him the usual privileges of such an office. In any case, as he told himself again, he did not mind. It was a small thing to have to submit to . . . *he* was being forced to submit to something much more severe.

He kept himself in that mood of semi-defiance all day, and at six he told his mother he was going out.

"Over to Stowe?" she asked.

She had put no questions to him all day. But he knew that she knew that he had written to Chicknick. He noticed now how flat her voice had grown.

"Yes, over to Stowe. Why do you think of Stowe?" For she was totally ignorant of Mabel, and now she might as well remain so.

"Oh, I thought you'd be a-goin', I did—somehow."

If she meant that for an invitation to confess something he was not inclined to accept. He did not feel that he now owed any compunctions to his mother. He told himself that she was letting him go from her life, had even bidden him go.

Well, he was going. But he would first take any little consolations he could snatch or that Mabel would be willing to afford him.

He found his way at once along the sandy beach and past

the hut. But only as he came in sight of the lighted cottage did a thought stay his feet. He had written to Mabel, but he had no reason to suppose that she would have had his letter the next morning. He planned to check any resentment she might feel at sight of him by forewarning her of his coming. But now his appearance on her doorstep would be the first notice she would have.

Well, he didn't care. He was going to suffer much: could not she endure to see him for a minute here?

Yet bold as his protesting spirit made him, when he reached the door and put up his great bony hand to knock, he hesitated; and, as he did so, he heard laughter from within. He was able to recognise one voice as that of his girl.

The sound of his knock stopped the laughter, stopped it dead, so that the giant, though knowing himself still unseen, felt suddenly hideously conspicuous and separated from his kind. A moment later a heavy foot in soft slippers slithered up to the other side of the door, a fumbling hand lifted the latch and then, suddenly, Daniel found himself blinking into a lamp-lit kitchen in which, though he could as yet discern no one clearly, he saw that several people were sitting. All eyes were on him, and to them he was fully exposed. He thought that somebody tittered, while he could feel that the opener of the door, whom he found to be a squat, elderly woman with plastered and streaky grey hair, was considering him out of globular eyes in curiosity and distaste.

"Well," she was saying, "well, and who might *you*——"

"*I* know," a voice came from beyond the lamp, and Mabel made her hurried way round the table and towards him. He had already discovered anger in her voice, and saw quick impatience in the little mouth and in the eyes that looked so dark now that she had passed in front of the lamp. "I know. That are that young big feller I told you of." There was a laugh at this, a young man's laugh, fresh and insolent. The girl turned back to smile, and following her glance Daniel caught a glimpse of a face that made active all his worst sick dreads. Too well he knew that face . . . the soldier.

"I didn't tell you to come here, giant," she was saying,

with her eyes now small and round and hard and full upon him; and she pushed him before her outside. She had closed the door behind her ere he could protest.

"I told you," she resumed sharply, "that you were *not* to come here."

"So that I shouldn't see your other man," he cried with shrill bitterness. She looked at him up and down in cold disfavour, and yet with some curiosity as if she wondered how the heart in this vulnerable body (in itself so vulnerable) could, with the smallest exertion on her part, be wounded most.

But she seemed to change her mind. "No" (answering him), "so that you shouldn't begin to spy on me. If men come to see me, especially if they be some of my own men-folk, I ought to say, o' course, Go away, there's a big silly of a giant think I care about him—not that I do, o' course—but if you come here, though you be only a friend or a body that I'd known always, he might come along and fall on you."

The giant gave back to this sudden onslaught as he was intended to do. He stared down at her in woeful confusion, trying to realise the hints she had seemed to give, that that man was merely a relation; that in any case he counted for very little in her mind; and that he, the giant, was still, if he but chose to please her by going away, the man of her heart. He found her almost unbelievably desirable and—small. For his mind ran easily and simply, and yet with a sort of tragic fatality, to miniature, and directed upon the minute that was also the lovely, a passion that exhausted itself.

"I'm going away," he said, and gulped. For having found her again to be his, he tasted the sick sweetness of the thought of parting. "Going away."

"'Bout time."

"No, you do not understand" (for he acquitted her of *that* unkindness). "I mean I'm off, going away from here, from Oldborne."

"Oh?" She spoke coolly, and now stepped back to examine him as well as she could in the light from the curtained window.

"Yes. Going—oh, p'r'aps to-morrow. That depend" —if only he could stir her—"that depend on a man."

"On a man?"

"Yes. But you come out for a few minutes. Get your hat and I can tell you."

For a minute she hesitated. Then she retreated within, closing the door. Daniel, waiting outside hungrily, heard suppressed laughter; and then she came again down the path, hat and coat on.

"Why don't you let me see your mother?" he began.

"What's this about your going away?" she countered, and countered so that he had to yield the ground in dispute.

"I—I've had a situation offered me."

"Oh?" Her interest was evidently secured: she even took his arm. He could not remember that her little hand had ever touched him like that. "Where be the situation?"

"It—it"—he had made up his mind that he need not tell her the whole truth—"I don't fare to know jest yet," and he did not know where Chicknick might be at that moment.

"You don't know?" The pressure of the little hand had relaxed. "You can't have much of a situation if you don't know where it be."

"Well, that's jest like this. He go travellin'. He be in one place showin' one day and——"

"*What?*" (His heart fell: he knew he had stopped too late.) "What?" she cried. "Showin'! You mean he's a showman! Then he's going to show *you*."

She stood away, and, too miserable to struggle against her words, he made no effort to recapture the lost position.

"Do you mean it?" she cried, her voice mocking. "Is that what you mean? But it must be, giant, you can't deny it! You've been and gone and got yourself into a show as a giant. Why," laughing outright, "you'll be a freak! a freak!"

"Stop, my dear—stop! I can't abear it. I can't——"

"A freak! No, you don't!" for he tried at last to capture her hand, and she receded towards her home.

"Then let me tell you the rest," he pleaded; and now,

perhaps from curiosity, she consented to stand. "I've got to do the best I can by my mother," he said; "there's rare good money in this job."

"How much?" she inquired slowly, with interest; and he told her.

"I'd have enough to keep her comfortable and that's my dooty——"

"Somehow I'd thought of you as a giant," she began, "but I'd never thought of you as a great, big, silly freak." She began to laugh again.

"Don't," he cried. "I really can't abear it, my dear. I can't! I'm a man——"

"Are you?" she asked insolently, stepping back. "I'll think of you as a freak now always, and, well—as you're going to be a freak giant, I'll wish you well and say good-night to you."

He sprang forward and seized her wrist, and for a moment she did not repel him.

"But you'll let me write to you?" he cried. "It bain't over? It bain't, be it? I mean our—our—love."

"Our love?" she repeated coolly. "I didn't know it got that far. But I'm not walking out with a freak, not I! I want a proper man."

"But I've *got* to go!" he cried in his agony; "I can't see how else I can do my duty by my mother."

"Well, go and do your duty by your mother. I ain't trying to stop you, am I? I only say I only walk out with men—not with freaks."

"But I can go on writin', can't I? Just to keep in touch-like. P'r'aps I needn't go on being—a freak, always; and then I could come back to you, Mabel dear."

"Well, you can write one letter now and agin. But you mustn't expect *me* to write much to a man that are funny-like, different from other men, and that be a freak in a show."

"Very well, liddle love." He thought his heart was broken; and his voice must have sounded like a sob. He had given in.

As for the girl, she still laughed lightly and continued to

retreat. For a moment he made no movement. Then he sprang forward, brought his great bones of hands down on her soft shoulders; and, plunging with his big moon face, he brought his lips to hers. And even now, though she may have decided that here was the end, she did not resent that attack, being a woman that loved violences. A moment later she wriggled away. "Now go along with you, do!" she said. "Run away to your show, giant, and I'll save up a shillin' to come and look at you."

"Don't!" he cried in his last agony. "Don't, Mabel, if you love me. But then you don't do that——"

"I should think not indeed! Still," as if relenting, "you can think about me a little sometimes if you like and you can write, only it's not to be often. 'Bye."

She turned and ran to the door, while he stood watching her enter. He was not near enough to hear the laughter that followed her return.

But he knew that she had gone back into the presence of that man inseparable in his mind from a memory of a wood.

When the door closed, Daniel turned and set out for home. This business had been hideous beyond all his expectations.

CHAPTER XIII

"WE shall want you to join us at Liverpool," Chicknick had written. In the early morning the giant rose. He had not slept all night, but had rolled from side to side of his cramped bed, while wave after wave of humiliation broke over him. Mabel's words returned again and again, until his experience of them seemed to become a shape. . . . "Going to make a show of yourself? Well, you always wore a funny-looking feller. Have you round here any more? You—a freak!"

"But," he had pleaded, "I have got to keep my mother. I can't leave her to fend for herself."

"Oh, well," with a toss of that lovely little head. "Keep your mother!"

"Choose between us," had seemed to be the challenge, and he had chosen. He had done his duty. Much joy that thought gave him!

In his tiny room where his head was continually being dusted with the chalk from the ceiling, he stood up, a long, rather foolish and ungainly figure, a vision of which, caught from the broken little mirror, gave him a sharp spasm of distaste.

Yet this morning he was fascinated by his own physical defects so that he looked again, first into the glass where his chalky, moonish face, under the lank and wispy hair, showed ineffective and melancholy; then over his elongated person with its conspicuous bones and miserable inadequacy of muscle; and finally at the big, ugly, misshapen feet.

He wasn't an oil painting, he confessed with feeble, self-wounding derision. What could Mabel make of such a figure? And yet, he went on in the same mood of poor irony, his figure was his fortune.

He shuddered, turned from this inspection and began to dress. To-morrow at this or some other like time he would be dressing. But in what a different environment—an environment the mere fact of which declared the value of this person of his, the cash value! Yes, to-morrow. . . . He shuddered again, threw on his clothes, and stumbled down.

In the kitchen his mother was already preparing breakfast. As he descended the last stair and could command a view of the living-room, he stood for a moment, observing. He experienced first a natural pang; here he was where, from his beginnings, he had been; and here he would *not* be to-morrow. He had always eaten the first meal of the day in this place; subconsciously he knew every corner in the room, had learnt to scent the food his mother would presently set before him; and to-morrow he would share a meal with aliens, a meal served in the way of aliens.

But the wistfulness was quickly swallowed in a curiosity. His mother leaned over the grate, busy with her cooking. Yet he was not curious about the dish, but about the person who prepared it. He was trying to read his mother from her back; that bent back surmounted by the still-black hair, with which Time had seemed to make a covenant.

From the moment he had announced his intention of joining Chicknick, she had seemed to close herself to his view. In other days he had found her easy to read, and she had even let him discover her mind about Chicknick's offer. She had plainly wanted him to accept it; and he had accepted. But now? Did she repent his acceptance? Did she want to keep him at home? Did she find no sense of humiliation in the fact that a son of hers was to be made into a public exhibition? Her back had sometimes seemed a communicative, even an eloquent back; but it told him nothing to-day. He faced the fact of its dreadful reticence, and cleared his throat.

"Good-morning, mother," he said, rather formally. He did not usually say that. She did not turn, though she responded with a murmur of some sort.

"It's a nice morning for my journey."

"Yes. Well, yes. But it'll be night, pretty well, by the time you git to the end of it."

He did not know in the least what she was talking about, and seemingly she was not talking about anything in particular; for when she turned, as she now did, her attention was on the food.

"You must have a good meal. You'll maybe not get another all day."

"That be very likely that I won't."

She looked at him out of her small, yellow face. She seemed very calm, and in no way moved by the fact that, for the first time in their lives, they were being separated. He might, with a little more subtlety, have suspected her of some kind of spiritual defect or impotency; or at least of some failure in the ordinary sense of drama. He was merely puzzled by her.

She put the bacon and eggs, eggs from his own hens, on the table, and brought the tea; and in a moment he was trying to eat. He had not before thought about the food, but he realised now that he was not hungry. Soon he pushed away his chair, and then he became aware that he was being searched by her steady eyes.

"What be the matter? You're not eatin'."

"I suppose I'm not hungry, mother."

"You ought to be. What d'you want not to eat for?"

"Don't feel like it. I suppose that be all this—this goin' away make one feel that bad."

"Nawthen to make you feel bad. Young man like you!"

It was hardly spoken, and it gave him a shock. He stared at her. How odd that *he* should feel broken and not she. But then she had not seemed upset when she had more or less urged him to accept Chicknick's offer. Some men would be proud to own a mother who, when past middle life, could so control herself. The giant was merely puzzled and, to be truthful, distressed. Something was missing. Only now did he realise how much his conception of his mother had changed in the last few days. He might have been going to Stowe for the afternoon and no more, for all the emotion which seemed to be excited in her. He was going away on a

long journey, and he might never see her again; and she ate her breakfast calmly—even, as he thought he saw, with enjoyment of the extra delicacies, for which the fact that this was his last morning at home was the excuse.

"O' course, mother, I'll write and send you the money reg'lar."

"Yes, you'll do that," she answered with unbroken front.

"You'll be able to get yourself a few little things that did not come your way afore."

"Oh, I'll get myself all I need; don't you worrit, son."

"And you'll let me have the news—about you——" he paused, drew a deep breath and coloured a little, "and anybody that do anythin' that I know about here."

As she was excluded from his secret he could not add, "friends in Stowe." But he wished he could have done so.

"Oh, I'll give you any news that there be to give. But I'm no letter-writer, son, as you know right well."

He had to be content with that. Yet again he wished he had a local correspondent, who knew of his interest in Mabel.

He got up presently because it was time to set off. He would have to walk the seven miles into Gippeswick, since Doddery only drove in once a day, and that at an hour too late to admit of catching the early train. He had sent his box the night before, by carrier, addressed to the station.

He put his hand to his pocket to be sure that his purse was safe, and he saw that his mother observed this motion. They had agreed that he was to take five pounds, together with some odd half-crowns: the five pounds was all he had been able to get for the poultry and poultry-houses, on which he had spent twenty.

The purchaser, a small tenant farmer, had paid with a single note, and that note now lay, still unbroken, in the purse. The giant's exact fare had been sent him by Chicknick. When he had proposed to leave the note with his mother, she had coldly repelled him.

"You needn't spend it. But you can't journey that far with nawthen at all."

He had agreed.

And now the moment had come for departure. Daniel, on his big feet, quivered with emotion. He knew not what he wanted, but it was something from this mother of his; something that she did not seem to give him. He did not know that he very much minded that she did not weep; he might have found it hard to solace her; but he would have liked some kind of acknowledgment that his sacrifice of the dignity of his manhood was felt by her as an act of devotion.

Well, she did not offer any sign. He must be content. He drew to the door, she following with what seemed to him inconceivably trite and futile injunctions about the regular use of a laundry, and the sending home of such garments as needed repair.

"Well, mother!" he said at last, turning in the doorway to look down upon her. And there they stood, that oddly contrasted pair; she so small, seemingly a poor bleak soul, with her emotional forces nearly exhausted; he preposterously long of limb yet feeble-looking, with his watery eyes and lolloping big hands and feet. He was certainly very much the more moved of the two, and bent over her to kiss her with a tremulous feeling that showed in his moist eye and twitching lip.

"Good-bye, mother. Good-bye. I did do the best I could for us all, I think. Good-bye."

"Aye. You've done the best," she said, making the nearest approach to an acknowledgment that she had offered. "You've done the best. Good-bye, son. Mind you write. And remember all I have bid you." She still spoke in a drab tone, and let him kiss her all untroubled. She watched him go, standing in her doorway and following him with her eyes until his long form had passed from sight round the corner.

It was then that, very slowly and deliberately, she came into the house and as carefully closed the door. For a moment she paused, staring wistfully at the place where he had sat, even at his only half-empty plate, with its spilled and congealed yolk and its cold bacon rind. Dully she

began to move these things from the table; but when halfway through her task, she could endure no more. The table now offered a bare space and, sinking down in his chair, she buried her face in her arms and wept until her body heaved with the violence of her weeping.

CHAPTER XIV

DANIEL sat uncomfortably upright in the stiff-backed third-class compartment. Twice, in the countryman's way, he made sure that his purse was safe. Then he looked across. He had only one companion, a small stout man with a lurid countenance, who stared at him quite frankly as at a portent, and who did not relax his gaze until he left the train at Peterborough. But Daniel scarcely knew that he was observed or, if he knew, he did not trouble. He was now a FREAK. It would now be his lot to be stared at, and this red-faced man was a mere unit of that potential crowd. If one was to be distressed by a scrutiny of this kind, one could scarcely support for a moment the staring of a crowd which had paid money to be allowed to stare. The little man really was doing his small part in breaking in to duty the elongated human spectacle who sat opposite.

Daniel kept his eye upon the passing country. He had an inborn passion for tree and pasture and living thing. The movement of a bird, the passage of a hare across the loam, always gave him a sense of rapture. But to-day it seemed to him that Nature had no consolation to offer and no refreshment, but merely mockery. Here, she seemed to say, is the world of revealed beauty, the world you are deserting for the tinsel prettiness of the show. Across these green and brown spaces blows the breath of Heaven, which you are exchanging for the odours of the circus, and the thick gas- and sawdust-laden air of the tent of the staring people.

For here lay the source of his greatest grief; he could not feel himself other than absurd, though he had sacrificed his manhood for the sake of his mother. This earth about him did not approve, and he needed its approval.

At Peterborough a new fellow-traveller entered. He was a lean-faced man with bright eyes, who had seemed to be considering the giant even before climbing into the compartment. He was very noticeably dressed in a tall black hat and a respectable black tail-coat, the dinginess of which was relieved by a green, embroidered waistcoat with mother-of-pearl buttons and a gold watch-chain. Upon three fingers he wore rings, and to Daniel he was plainly a man of substance, if not of distinction.

But it was less his appearance than some subtle atmosphere which he seemed able to disseminate which had its effect upon Daniel. Almost before this man had spoken, the giant felt sensibly impressed by the presence of a highly agreeable companion. There was something human, if a little pervasive, about the man's personality, which caught the poor lonely heart of the elongated creature going into freakish exile.

The stranger having settled himself, commented on the weather; and when the train had moved out showed himself ready to talk.

"Going far?" he asked in a quick, bright, and extremely agreeable manner.

"Liverpool," answered Daniel. He had no wish for conversation in the ordinary way, but this man conquered by his vivid and easy air.

"It's a great port, that. You have friends there?"

"Well, that bain't it exactly." Daniel, who was a truth-loving soul, considered what would be an honest description of the manner of things.

"Going to a situation perhaps?" hazarded this rather persistent inquirer.

"Yes." Daniel caught the phrase almost eagerly, "that do be about it."

"Well then, I 'ope to Moses you know all about 'em," said the bright-eyed man—looking, as it seemed, *through* the giant—even perhaps looking into his pockets. "For, you know, you can't be too careful in these big cities. I suppose I'm a bit of an innocent myself. They tell me it's my open face. Too like a child's to be quite safe, they say."

Daniel examined the countenance thus described with some astonishment. It did not seem to him to be marked by any such handicapping air of innocence.

"Yes," went on this garrulous cherub, "I'm always being the victim of my own green innocence. Las' time I was in Liverpool I 'appened to fall in with a talkative sort of a bloke. *You* know—the kind that *will* talk. And when 'e's talked to you a bit 'e gets you to show 'im your purse. And well, you can guess the rest. You just be on your guard, young man."

"I will that," said David, involuntarily putting his hand to the pocket where his purse lay. "They won't catch *me*."

"No. That's what we *all* say. That's what *I* said. And then they come along and over we go; caught we are." He thus corrected himself to show that he had a proper feeling for the preservation of a metaphor.

"Look here, now, I've a fancy for you, young man. You've one of them nice open faces like me own. I don't like thinking that you'll get sold a pup in Liverpool, like I was. No, I don't. So look here—I'll just show you the trick they played on me. Then you'll be on your guard."

"Well," said Daniel, half laughing, "that fare to be a good thought."

He felt friendly towards this second stranger who made no comment on his size, nor even seemed aware of it. To ignore the monstrous element, whatever it may be, is to use the open sesame to the heart of a sorrowful freak.

"Yes," he repeated, "it do seem an idea."

"Oh, it *is* an idea," said the stranger. "Very well then. Just try to think I'm the wrong 'un. I come up to you. 'Morning,' I say, 'I'm a philanthropist, I am. Just made my pile in Australia—Bendigo. I've got a lot o' money to give away. But what I need is a young man to help me—a young man that knows England. You look like that young man. But I don't know you. I'll have to test you. And the best way for us to prove we're all right is for us each to put our purses on the table.'"

The cherub first looked at his watch, an action for which

there seemed no reason at all; and then thrust upon his knee a leather case. Daniel watched, but did nothing.

"Now," said the cherub, "if you've got a purse on you —it don't matter if you 'aven't—put it alongside mine."

Daniel drew out his purse. After all there could be no risk with one so transparently honest that, so far from perpetrating a trick, he was seeking to expose one.

"Very well," said the cherub. "Now count over your money. When you've found it all correct, you 'and it over to me to check. Of course you needn't really 'and it to me," he added with a pleasant smile. He did not care whether Daniel had a purse, or whether, having one, he handed over his money to be checked. But his easy indifference immensely charmed his tall companion; and so, pleased by the frank and open manner of the other, Daniel placed the money in his hands. The cherub counted the single note and the loose silver; counted it carefully and then returned it.

"Perhaps now," he said, "you'd like to count mine? For that's what the smarmy fellow said to me. But you have to say, 'Oh no, I don't mind about that'—that's what *I* said—what I was *meant* to say. And after that we solemnly exchange addresses and arrange to meet next day. But of course we don't meet next day. We never meet again."

"And the man, he have, o' course, taken suffen out o' your purse?"

"Exactly. 'E's taken the gold, or paper—if there is any gold, or paper—and left you with the few shillings."

"I—I see," said Daniel. This agreeable cherub had again glanced at his watch, and at the same time the train began to slacken speed. Looking about him Daniel found himself being enclosed, as it seemed, with walls and chimneys. A minute later a station had been reached and the cherub was on his feet.

"I got to leave you 'ere. Best of friends must part, eh? But I'm very glad I met you, if only to put you on yer guard. Just you be very careful, and be particularly careful of men who talk about being very green and innocent. They're really the boldest. They're quite equal to warnin'

you against men of their own sort. I've knowed a feller of that kind to get a man in a railway carriage, just like this, an' while pretending ter show 'im 'ow the confidence trick is worked, robbin' him by that very trick. They get so tired of doing the trick in the ordin'ry way they 'ave to think of somethin' new, and they get bold—take risks. So just you be careful when you get to Liverpool, young man. I shouldn't be surprised if even before ter-night you was to find yerself robbed—ye're that innocent, and then you'll be wishing you had *me* within your reach."

A little nettled by this reiterated suggestion that he wore the air of a fool, Daniel coloured. "Oh, I reckon I can look after myself, thank you, sir. I dessay I can take care of what little I've got. And as for wishin' you were within reach, sir—though I'm thankful I met you and have had your warnin', nobody'll play that purse trick on *me;* I do not suppose I'll have to set out to find you."

"Well, well, if I am right, remember my words, young man! And now good-day to you."

The cherub was already at the door. He had seemed to loiter until the train had almost begun to move again, but now he stood on the platform, the face which he had declared to be his undoing lifted towards Daniel and his eyes smiling a farewell.

A minute afterwards the train was running through a deep cutting.

Presently, from old habit, Daniel's hand went to the place where his purse should be. Yes, it was there safe enough. He smiled fondly. He knew one trick of the men whom he must meet in the world.

At the next station there was a demand for tickets. Daniel drew out his purse, found the ticket, held it out. But when the ticket inspector tried to hand it back he found the passenger was not attending to him.

"Your ticket," he said, suddenly and sharply.

Daniel started, looked up, took the ticket with a wooden motion. For in truth he had neither eye nor brain for his ticket. He was still looking deep into his purse, from which the five-pound note, so clean and crisp, had been withdrawn.

He did not need to ask himself a single question. The cherub had offered to give him a lesson, and he had done so. The cherub had said that he, Daniel, might wish to have him within reach before night, and here the giant sat very much wishing that his smart fellow-traveller with the bright eyes *was* at hand now.

Daniel looked into the grey afternoon. He was in the midst of industrial Yorkshire, with the chimneys of Lancashire not far away. He felt an unspeakable fool and yet a fated one. It really seemed to him as if he was intended to be the sport of shrewder minds. He found himself utterly forlorn. It was not the mere loss of the five pounds, though that was serious: it was the hideous suspicion that he would never be able to protect himself. He was not like other men, and he never would be. He wore the mark of the freak and the fool. He was a sorry and abject futility. He proclaimed himself a natural butt as well as a monstrous offence to the eye, and when he looked up and out upon the scene before him, his doubts and fears increased.

These chimneys and factories seemed to him to be cruel—to be, indeed, the incarnate spirits of so many servants of the remorseless fate that pursued him. He had never seen them before, and they looked to him to be settled upon the land like great swollen bullies living on a meek-tempered populace.

Life seemed, indeed, to the poor giant to be at its lowest ebb. He felt absurd, unheroic; as Quixote might have felt if he had recognised the windmill for what it was. And this unfriendly world about him seemed to speak the same language as these mysterious whispering tongues that mocked him for the fool he was.

And then suddenly the smoke fell away and the fire of a setting sun drew his eye to the purple hills far in the west before him. As the mists flew from before the sky, the whole scene changed as by miracle. Here were golden and blazing clouds; there those wide spaces of sapphire sky that give the cribbed soul of man a sudden sense of amplitude; purples and azures in distances; and a rolling blackness beyond like a frame. And in the centre

burnt and sank the blood-red dying sun, nobler in its going, as it seemed to the giant, than he had ever before seen it. Its great shafts of blood and gold struck through purple and fleecy clouds, until at last the whole sky seemed involved in the glory.

The giant gazed and drew a deep breath. These chimneys he knew not: these blackened factories with their hungry engines were no acquaintances of his; that black smoke rolling thickly into the wind was never part of his experience. But yonder setting sun was a familiar friend, bringing with it radiant memories, not of evening alone but of his Suffolk day. He remembered the cold tang of the morning as he went out to dig; and then the getting warm; and how earth and the worker seemed to become reconciled; how he looked up at noon in midsummer days to see the sun in the south, pale behind its own warm, white mists; or how, in a shining steely sky, it hovered like a red ball in the west as he was preparing to finish his work in the winter. This was the world he knew. And for a brief interval his sick heart forgot its sorrow and humiliation.

But when night closed about the train, so that all this big, silly, and cheated passenger could see were the little gleaming lights of factory windows, that were so many eyes of the devouring dragon of noise and commerce, he surrendered again to his gloom, and, with head sunk forward, he told himself that for such as he life was a martyrdom that ended only, if it ended then, when the body went underground.

CHAPTER XV

I

"WE start showing to-morrow night."

Chicknick, a dark, thin figure, his face seen in the light of a huge flare, stood in the show-ground, his shrinking new exhibit, just arrived, standing beside him. Daniel scarcely knew how he had found his way from the station. But he realised that the hideous experience upon which he had deliberately entered was now begun.

Hazily he heard his master continuing, "Yes, we open to-morrow. And the folk won't get better value in the three kingdoms." The last sounded like a quotation from a bill. And indeed the thought may have occurred to Chicknick, for, thrusting a hand into his pocket, he pulled out a printed slip.

"There! That 'll interest you," he said. "Take it along." Daniel pocketed the bill. "The freaks', that is the human exhibits', quarters are over there. Here, Big 'Un!"

Daniel started, for a moment supposing himself addressed. Then he discovered that, at the hail, an extremely small figure, possibly one of the boys employed to sell programmes, or the infant son of some member of the staff, was hurriedly approaching.

To reach them the boy had to step into darkness, and when he joined them Daniel could see no more than the dim outline of his figure.

"This," said Chicknick solemnly, "is Mr. Windmill, our new giant. You'd better take him and show him his quarters."

The boy made a curious grunting response, and then,

flinging what seemed to Daniel to be an inordinately long arm before him, as though to point the way, he set off, the new member of the staff following.

Presently they reached what was plainly a caravan, with steps running up to an obscure doorway, beyond which the light of a small lamp flickered. The promise of a light reminded Daniel that he still had the handbill to read, but his attention was not yet free for that. The boy in the meantime clambered in rather unboylike manner up the stairs, and the giant swung his way after him.

When the boy entered he turned under the lamp so that its rays fell across his face and Daniel, coming to the top step of the ladder and beginning to bend his head preparatory to entering, could discern his guide. The effect upon him was to make him start back and catch his head in the roof. For what he saw was no boy but a man —if a very strange, small one.

The dwarf stood smirking at him, apparently enjoying the other's confusion.

"Thought I was one of the lads? Well, you needn't take on so. I'm quite pretty, so long as I ain't a-interfered with." Suddenly he frowned so that Daniel started. For it seemed to the giant that the face, from being merely strange and wrinkled and unprepossessing, had become definitely terrifying. In spite of his vast and absurd superiority in inches he felt afraid of those dark eyes, so big for that body; but then the head was absurdly large and totally disproportionate; he wished he had been put in other charge.

"Yes, I'm a bit of danger I am. A little bit of 'orrid danger to them that troubles me. I'm little, but these arms have done a bit, and so 'ave these 'ands"; and he held out menacingly two great claws that seemed to have power to seize upon poor Daniel's intimidated heart.

"You're to lie 'ere, so the boss says. It's where we put the other little 'un."

"You mean the giant?" asked Daniel.

"Guessed it! I mean the last chap that was 'ere before you. Not much of a giant 'e wasn't. We 'ad to put six

inches on 'is 'eels an' brush 'is 'air up like a female's, and then I've 'eard people say 'pooh.' *You* ain't no proper giant either, come to that. But I dessay you'll make up a bit better than 'im."

"What—what have happened——?"

"What—to '*im?*" said the dwarf. "Oh, 'e goes round with the bills now, an' 'ands out the tickets and makes 'imself generally useful. 'E'll 'ave 'is say when 'e sees *you*, and 'e's got a way of talkin', 'as our last little feller." He paused and then went on: "Well, but no, 'e don't sleep 'ere. 'E ain't an exhibit no more." How Daniel's heart swelled with envy! "We exhibits don't mix with the common crowd."

Whether this last remark was intended ironically Daniel had no means of judging. He was, indeed, too confused by his new and deep fear of this "dangerous" dwarf.

"I suppose I be 'llowed to settle myself here now."

"Well, I should think so. Nobody else is likely to do it for yer, young man, there not being any valets about as I knows of. If ye thinks *I'm* going——"

"Oh no, I didn't think that Mister——" he paused for the name.

"Mister nothing. I'm Big 'Un. You're Little 'Un. That's what we all are 'ere. Whatever you are, you *ain't!* See? Our living skellington's Fatty. The one afore 'im was Fatty. Our fat woman is Skinny. Always was Skinny, an' jest the same when we 'ad a fat man. So now you know."

"Thank you very much." Daniel felt dimly that perhaps thanks were necessary. And he then began to try to discover in what manner the caravan was arranged. There seemed on either side to be a very narrow straw mattress arranged along a shelf. Under and above these major shelves were smaller ones. But when, seeing that the shelves over his bed were occupied, he sought to feel under, the dwarf, who had been watching him, broke in.

"No yer don't. There ain't any room there for you, Little 'Un. No, there ain't. First come first served, and that's where I keep *my* duds."

Daniel looked about him. It seemed as if the caravan was packed by a vast assembly of objects of all kinds. He had to peer to discover what these were. Some of them appeared to be clothes, but there were also tins, a cracked jug with a washing basin of a different pattern and a plate of half-eaten food; the whole making a highly unsavoury effect, strangely mixed up with a half-revealed garishness of tinselled uniform hanging in a further corner. Daniel's heart ached for the sweet poverty of his cottage home, its little, clean, bare spaces, the dignity of its lack. And mingled with the assault to eye was a less quickly directed attack on his nostrils. There was a frowsy smell made up of unwashed clothes, standing food, and perhaps of some sleeping animal which shared the dwarf's home. And indeed a mangy terrier pup presently came from under the dwarf's bed, revealing for what purpose *that* space was reserved.

"You can turn in or not as yer like. I'm going to look for a wet," said the minute and evil freak, spitting disgustingly. Suddenly he paused. "Got any sweet as 'oney on yer?"

The giant gasped.

"Sweet as honey?"

"Money. Money. Don'tcher know English?"

Daniel had been so deeply involved since being taken in hand by Chicknick that not once had he remembered his loss. But now the thought of it came flooding in, turning his answer to a stammer.

"I'm wholly done. I had suffen but," with a smile of weak confusion, "I lost it, nigh all, in the train."

"Lorst it? Wonder 'ow yer did that? Sharper got at yer p'r'aps?" It had been only a shot; but, seeing from Daniel's manner that he had guessed true, he followed up his words with "Might 'ave thought as much. Yer not safe to be out alone. 'Ow much did 'e swindle yer? *'Ow* much! A *fiver!* Oh, muvver!" His voice had attained a crescendo of mingled astonishment, contempt, and satisfaction. Here was a prize gump. And a man should rejoice when offered so distinct a specimen.

"I wonder yer muvver let yer arht." The giant did not

offer to prove that it was precisely his mother who *had* let him. "I wonder yer wasn't locked up. Yer cawn't be safe to be arht by yerself. The other big 'un 'll like to 'ear abaht you. He will an' all. I'll want two glasses o' milk to-night after that."

He took one more scrutiny of the giant, who failed to withstand his gaze, and then turned away swinging his long arms, while Daniel retreated to the further end of the caravan. He looked about him, miserably confirming all the worst of his first impressions; and it was again the foul, frowsy smell of clothes indifferently clean and body-odorous that assaulted his quivering senses. Here he must now live. This was his escape, his sanctuary from the exhibition tent. Suddenly he remembered something; his hand went to his pocket and he drew out the bill which Chicknick had told him would interest him.

"First appearance in any show.
The wonder of the age.
DANIEL WINDMILL,
the world's champion giant.
The Man-mountain.
Has to be seen to be——"

He crumpled up the bill and flung it under his foot.

II

For the rest of his life the memory of that first performance remained a living emotion of horror in the giant's mind. As preliminary to the major experience he had had an impression of noise—the roar of the lion; the laugh of the hyæna; horses being led to the entrance into the ring; the curses of the two or three raffish-looking fellows calling themselves "lion-tamers"; the loud derision of that ex-giant of whom he had heard so much, when that superseded hero discovered that his dispossessor was near enough to hear; the plaudits of the vile and callous crowd within that

marquee; its vacuous laughter; the shrill scolding of the middle-aged woman in spangles and with a wig, who was called "the famous Continental Juggler," because her stout wasn't to hand when she came off; and finally the hard voice of Chicknick the showman, as he began his speech in introduction of his freaks.

"As you will admit, ladies and gentlemen, when you've seen them, these constitute a very remarkable collection of specimens of the vagaries of nature. Big and little, fat and thin, we have them here, and we shall show you such a variety as I make bold to say has very rarely been witnessed within the compass of a single entertainment. These monstrosities have had the honour of appearing before, among others, his Serene Highness the Hereditary Prince of Saxe-Wernigen, her Highness the Princess Arabella of Herm, his Grace the Duke of Phatland, the most noble the Marquis of Little Tootsley, and a large number of other members of ruling houses and of the nobility and gentry of this and all other European countries. His Serene Highness did me the honour of saying that he had never seen anything like my freaks in the whole of his life, while his Grace the Duke was condescending enough to communicate to me the fact that at the sight of them he was blest. And I am sure, ladies and gentlemen, when you have seen them you will only echo the deliberate judgment of these illustrious persons.

"I am prepared to issue a challenge that no four specimens of humanity could be found to surpass, or even to equal, my living skeleton, my fat woman, my dwarf, and my giant.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, with this brief and simple preliminary, I will introduce you, first of all, to the celebrated Madame Fatima, the heaviest woman in Europe."

The next moment Daniel, from his corner of obscurity, saw that vast bulk, which had been waiting its turn in front of him, convey itself to the stage, the boards creaking heavily as Chicknick always carefully contrived that they should do, on the lady's entry. Listening, Daniel could hear Chicknick's voice as it resumed:

"Madame Fatima. The lady will seat herself on this

throne, which, as you will note, is really a weighing-machine. If any lady or gentleman would care to step forward to check the weight, he or she is at liberty to do so."

But with British self-consciousness the public dared not respond to the unctuously delivered invitation, and sat tightly in its place. Apparently Chicknick had himself to read the indicator.

"Thirty-nine stone, four pounds, three and a half ounces." (Sensation in the crowd—a sensation which could be felt at the back of the platform where poor Daniel shivered and waited.)

There was some little further talk, Madame condescendingly sitting on an ordinary chair and breaking it, to the intense delight of the thoroughly intrigued audience, and finally retiring to a corner, so as to be ready by contrast to contribute to the effect about to be wrought by the living skeleton. This person, who, as Daniel presently learnt, performed a duty always reserved in the profession to his own sex, just as achievement of the opposite kind was left to the more tender feminine, went on with the support of a groom. The latter, having done his duty, came by Daniel, remarking as he did so, "That there skellington won't be 'ere much longer for *anybody* to 'elp along."

That had been Daniel's own impression from the meeting he had had with the unhappy man at dinner, when Chicknick had watched to see that his skeleton ate no more than sufficed to hold soul and body for a little longer. A special, non-flesh-forming diet had, as a matter of fact, been devised for the skeleton, but even of this he was allowed to eat but sparingly. Fatima, on the other hand, was always plied with cheap sugary stuff, and encouraged to eat by the premium which Chicknick allowed on every additional stone weight added.

Chicknick's talk about the skeleton could be heard clearly where Daniel waited.

"It is almost possible, ladies and gentlemen, to see through him. Certainly the human anatomy in all its wonderful symmetry can be seen. I will ask my friend now to remove his coat." (Skeleton does so. Sensation.)

A subtler intelligence than Daniel's might find itself asking whether the cynical soul of Chicknick took a queer pleasure in deliberately manufacturing fustian of this sort.

"You will observe that every rib is visible. Medical men have frequently sought, and I need scarcely add, obtained from me, permission to examine this remarkable figure. They have found it of great service as affording them an opportunity of examining the skeleton of the human form while its owner is still alive. The exhibit, ladies and gentlemen, is so light that once, when we were showing at Brighton" (the mention of a seaside resort so celebrated and so much a part of the great metropolis visibly increased the impressiveness of the communication that followed)—"when we were at Brighton and I had occasion one morning to take my friend for a walk on the pier, the wind rose suddenly, whereupon he was lifted bodily off the pier and flung into the sea." (Sensation.) "He was only rescued with difficulty, the tide carrying him away at a great speed. He is so light that a child could lift him. If any young gentlemen below the age of fourteen would care to come up here and try——" But no young gentleman was able to summon up a spirit so adventurous.

Next it was the turn of the dwarf. He went swaggering on as soon as he had heard the preliminary words of introduction.

"The smallest full-grown man born in Europe, and only surpassed in the habitable globe by General Tom Thumb."

This remark, as Daniel found later, never failed to wound the sensibilities of the dwarf, but was always made by Chicknick when addressing urban as distinct from yokel audiences, from a fear that some persons sitting before him, who had seen Barnum's celebrated midget, might challenge a claim that the Chicknick exhibit was the smallest in the world.

"Our dwarf is so small that he has often amused himself by entering among the infants of the national school in the towns we visit; while kind old ladies, seeing him in the street at night, have frequently remonstrated with him and inquired whether his mother knew he was out." (Laughter.)

" Scientists and explorers who have returned from Central Africa tell me that he is smaller than any of the famous pigmy peoples to be seen in that country. To make you realise how small he is, I will now place near him an exhibit of another kind."

Daniel had had explained to him that the last remark would be his cue, but though the words reached him he made no move. He felt utterly incapable of stretching a limb. Somehow, during the evening, he had contrived to array himself in an absurd red and gold coat and a long and tight pair of dark blue military trousers. They were to him the veritable badge of his humiliation, and the thought of issuing from the kindly darkness which still protected him and his imbecile uniform from the gaze of human curiosity was quite intolerable. Wearing his own clothes he could not have moved; but in these garish and loathly " duds " the thing was doubly impossible. He merely sat. Meanwhile there was a strange hush, and the sense of this expectant silence reached him. He reacted far too quickly to impressions not to be made instantly aware that all those hundreds of people were now waiting—for him. And he knew that he had not the personality to resist their gaze. He could merely feel the awful pressure of *their* personalities upon his poor, weak soul and body. He could have screamed under the pain.

But suddenly a voice called; then another voice spoke harshly. A message was being passed on in louder tones as it came nearer. It was the dispossessed giant who, delighted with the first failure of his rival, came with his croaking cry. " Where's that Windmill? The boss is snarlin' arht for the fool. 'Eld up, 'e is. Oh, 'e's 'ere? Well, you'd better get on in under a second, or your job won't be worth the price of a beer. You to call yourself a show! An' yer don't even know 'ow ter go on! Taking the bread outer honest men's mouths—an' cawn't eat it yerself."

The remark evidently satisfied its contriver, for he repeated it as Daniel, who had not said a word, stumbled forward. The other giant's remark provided him with the necessary motor force to carry him to the platform, but

otherwise he scarcely knew its purport. He had to draw aside a curtain to reach Chicknick, and now he stood swayingly with his long bony hand irresolutely gripping the spangled cloth. A man—one of the "grooms"—called "Go *on*, yer fool," and this had the necessary effect. Daniel pulled the curtain, took a step forward, started back when caught suddenly by the bright lights; tried to look at Chicknick, but withdrew his glance before the angry glare in the manager's eyes; and then awkwardly stepped towards his employer just as the showman resumed:

"Here, ladies and gentlemen, is our giant, perhaps the most remarkable specimen of overgrowth now before the public. For I would wish you to note that this young man, being still young, is likely, in the opinion of medical men who at my request have examined him, to grow considerably." (This was only the first of the remarkable facts about himself of which Daniel now heard for the first time.) "So that you are privileged to-night not only to see what is, perhaps, the tallest man in England to-day, but one who is likely to establish himself in the course of the next year so as to be indisputably the tallest living being. Look at him and then glance at our midget and you will realise the contrast that is possible between two human creatures. And now turn your gaze again to our giant." ("*Stand straighter*," he whispered sharply to Daniel.) "The young man comes from the county of Suffolk. It was here that he grew up, early attracting to himself the curiosity of strangers and at last coming under the notice of myself. I think I may claim to spare neither time nor money in looking for new attractions to place before my kind patrons. I found *him*. He is quite intelligent, I may say, and in his own village takes an interest in natural history."

(Daniel shuddered. *This* disclosure seemed an indecency.)

"Though he has only recently joined our company, he has already become one of our chief wonders. Our freaks, being the best in the country, involve, of course, enormous expense, but we are willing to face this if, by so doing, we can offer our patrons specimens which are, in their own

department, the final word. It is as such that I present to you my friend whom you see before you, Mr. Daniel Windmill, the Suffolk giant."

While this speech had been proceeding, Daniel had hung his head till the sharp whispered remonstrance from his exhibitor had made him suddenly lift it and thus involuntarily meet the gaze fastened upon him.

For a moment he saw through mists those long arrays of eyes, until all these eyes seemed to draw into one vast cruel eye that observed him without pity or understanding. It blazed at him; it bore him down; it stripped him of his garish uniform; it robbed him of his humanity; and finally set him up, naked, dehumanised and utterly ignoble, a show and a mockery. The thought crossed his mind: did *one* among those men and women who had paid their money to gloat over physical deformity, as well as to admire dexterity in the control of horses; did one single human creature there opposite carry a notion of the spiritual torture which was being endured by the other human creature who made the show? Hidden there in the crowd was there a single strain of sympathy? Or did all suppose that he who stood there for their pleasure, shared that pleasure, and exulted in his ignoble and absurd publicity?

From somewhere near at hand Chicknick's voice poured out its stream of smooth insincerities: it took the giant a minute or two to realise that this kind of thing which he had heard declared of the other freaks was now being said of himself. But the fact when discovered was comparatively unimportant now, since, in any case, the eye of that crowd would cover him without pity and without a pause. In an extreme degree he had that experience that so many of us know; when it seems to us that our store of personality is insufficient to withstand the attack made upon it by the massed forces of a crowd's curiosity. They are not looking at one another, the victim cries, but all of them at me alone. I, only, am the object of their thought, and talk, and merciless staring; of their secret spiritual satires; of their objective contempt. I, that ordinarily dwell alone, and that perhaps may have hesitated to meet my own face in

the glass, I am exhibited, pierced, flung to the ground; and still the cruel stare of that eye, void of humanity, follows me.

To Daniel every moment was an unspeakable agony. He felt chained down to the torture. He could have as little escaped of his own volition as he could have come upon that platform in the strength of his own purpose. His heart cried, even shrieked for release. But it was a release that only Chicknick could provide.

When it was all over, the impression left on Daniel's mind was of something vile and obscene—an affront to manhood, a gross, foul insult to all humanity. He stumbled out of the tent when the last of the crowd had gone happily homeward; and, his eyes still dazzled by the flare which for an hour had been blazing before him, he sought the welcome darkness.

He hastened across to the little, evil-smelling caravan which was now his home, with difficulty avoiding tent-ropes as he went. His hope was that the dwarf would not go there at once, and he was relieved, on clambering up the steps, to discover himself alone. He lighted a candle, caught a glimpse of his lean figure, ridiculous in its mock military uniform, and shuddered. Then he flung himself down upon his bed. He shook anew with horror, as each memory swept over him of some precise moment of experience during that late evening's torture. For in that way did the things which he had endured now begin to trouble him.

And as he reminded himself between the waves of miserable remembrance, this was now to be his life. He had surrendered himself up to an experience in which successful endurance represented the nearest thing to bliss which was within his grasp.

CHAPTER XVI

I

LIFE for the giant now became an agony, only relieved when, worn out with resisting the stares, the proddings, the questionings, and the breath of a dull, callous, and curious crowd, he crept into his caravan, and after lying open-eyed, sometimes for hours, at last fell asleep.

Trapped. Here he must stay. Certainly he could never go home. His mother had willed the surrender of his body to Chicknick. He would never have been there but for her. So that even his mother was his enemy. . . . But perhaps, when he sent home his first money, she would learn to value his sacrifice.

And he thought of Mabel's ". . . Very well, go and *be* a freak!" "Is that all you have to say?" . . .

Still, he would assure himself she had sent him away for a special offence, and through no general weariness of him. And at last he wrote: "Every day I tell myself that I must have learnt to miss you less, and every day I find I miss you more." And he ended, "Your old sweetheart, Dan'l."

II

Yes, every day in the camp, even every hour, was of unrelieved agony. And it seemed to him that it must be endlessly so. Every form of human sympathy was denied him. Where, in this coarse company, could he look for help? And as time passed, and he found himself separating each personality from the others in his mind, he grew less hopeful. Almost at once he had begun to fear. All treated him with either indifference or open contempt,

and he had learnt to dread their ridicule. They saw that he was not of themselves and openly laughed at him. But he knew presently that he must fear more than mere derision. There were men, two at least, who intended him more than mockery. These two were the dwarf, whose name, he found, was Spruce, and his supplanted rival, that big powerful ruffian, named Bligh and called "Blight," who eyed him always with contempt for his weakness, and enmity for the act of supplanting. And with these men he must live this life, that was made up of a torturing progress from city to city. It seemed to him as if no sort of relief could ever be offered; as if no life could admit of rest which involved living daily with these men.

He did not guess that to the action of this very pair he was to owe the entry into his life of the experience that was to change everything, even all his values.

They had reached Birmingham on Saturday afternoon and opened to great and excited throngs. It happened that at this time Daniel's growing terror of his rival seemed to approach a climax. During the previous few days this man had begun to threaten him with strange, hideous forms of violence and humiliation, so that often Daniel would grow pale and try to hide himself.

And yet it was to this man and the dwarf that the giant was to be so heavily indebted. For if they had not frightened him into the street on that Sunday afternoon, the greatest thing in his life would not, then, have been given him.

He could remember how, lying in his fœtid caravan, with his heart crying out for Mabel, he had been brought suddenly to his feet in alarm. Somewhere near voices spoke.

"Let's take the thing out and truss 'im up. And then we could . . ."

He knew the voices. Hitherto he had not received the violence so often promised. But the moment had come.

He sprang up, white and trembling, and came quickly down the stairs. The pair were not in view, and the caravan still separated him from their sight. He dodged away to the great marquee and, using its shelter, he made

his way to the street. Going, he had a sense of ignoble flight. But he did not stop. Where to go he knew not.

On any day but a Sunday he would not have dared to enter these streets. Seen from the shelter of the exhibition ground on a Saturday night, with their noisy, bustling crowds, they had terrified him. But now this thoroughfare seemed to offer him a quiet path of escape from the horrors of the camp. It was about half-past five and the day was still light; and he set off, his long legs awkwardly obeying his demand for haste.

He knew nothing of this great city of Birmingham, and had no notion whether he was making his way out into the country or approaching the city's centre.

Now and again people stopped to observe him; and once a party of boys set up a mock cheer, and one recognised him. "'E's escaped from the show. 'E's the giant! 'E's the freak!" At a street corner three girls, smart in their Sunday dress, waited till he was right up and abreast of them before breaking into shrieks of delight, and light, happy derision.

"There's enough of 'im for the three of us!" Even to them he was not a man. He was a show, something to tell other girls about, or to make the subject of a tale for the young men they would meet later.

"Y' never saw . . . O my! I thought I'd never stop laughing. And with a face . . ." Daniel's tortured fancy invented the actual sentences.

Presently he began to lose the little bit of purpose which had brought him thus far. He was certainly getting further into the town, and there were more people about. This last fact puzzled him for a minute; but catching the sound of a bell, a sound that was followed a moment later by the bursting forth of one peal and then of another, he understood.

He only now realised that it was Sunday. Or rather he only now realised the occasion in terms other than that of the thinking of members of Chicknick's company. In camp, Sunday was an occasion for sleeping; and, so far as

the dwarf was concerned, heavy drinking. Most of the others spent the day of rest as best they could, sitting about their frowsy caravans, half dressed until the afternoon, when a few, putting on their best, would set out to wander aimlessly among the alien scenes of whatever town it was in which they found themselves, while they expressed to one another their wish that they were back in London. His experience of the first Sunday had given Daniel a shock, for at home he had always accompanied his mother to church, though with no clear idea of why they went. That she had communicated to him a vague sense of some imperative, ordering man to pay homage to his Maker once a week, is to be supposed from the fact that the giant was vaguely disturbed that his fellow-show-folk made no pretence of religious observance.

But when he found that Sunday was a day for sleep, he soon acquiesced in the habit of the rest of Chicknick's party. Once, when there was a park near, he had gone there and sat down; but the crowds drove him away.

But to-day his quickly mounting terror of his two enemies had sent him into the town. And now upon his ear broke that peal of bells, challenged at once by another peal, until the sky of dusk, that seemed shut in by high buildings above his head, seemed to be full of sound.

It was a familiar sound, and reminded him of something smaller and sweeter. Yes, these people, if they stared at him, were thinking of something else. They were going to church.

For Daniel, church attendance had seemed a duty only as long as he had his mother to lead him. Religion meant for him nothing at all. One might be bidden to thank one's God for one's creation, preservation, etc. But had *he* any reason to be grateful because he had been created? And as for preservation, when had God preserved *him?* He was an outcast, a fool, the scorned of the whole world. And if by "preserving" him was meant keeping him alive, what cause was there for thankfulness in that?

God had seemed to him a Being too remote and too exalted to have relation of any sort with one of his

abject insignificance. The fact that there were men, specially appointed, who were permitted intercourse with the Deity, he had accepted without question. These men were the vicars of the various parishes. That they had some right to this communion he gathered from the words they spoke in public. But he could not discover that relationship to the Supreme Being was permissible for a man of his own rank. God, he had been credibly informed, had made the world and had made him. He did not know why God had chosen to make him tall, too tall. He would often have liked to ask a question or two on this point. But after his one and only talk with the Vicar he had never cared to ask further questions. He had tried, by listening hard in church, to discover some clue to the mysterious Being who in some way was signified in that dim altar. But he never discovered anything, and finally arrived at the conclusion that God, Heaven, and spiritual communion were, like the glebe, the privilege and possession of the gentleman known as "the Vicar." He had then given up thinking very much about the matter.

His mother took him to church, where he looked over all other heads at the rising of the congregation. And he got through the time that followed by dozing or reading curious things that were to be found in the Prayer Book, such as the mysterious process called the Churching of Women, the Baptismal Service, or, what interested him most profoundly, the Service for the Burial of the Dead. He had, one imagines, that curious instinct for mortality which was even more common seventy years ago among the class to which he belonged than it is to-day. The contemplation of the fact of Death was then, even more than now, a recreation of men and women who rarely had very little else to vary the monotony of a hard life, and who saw in Death something possessing a dignity absent from their common round. And so Daniel, sitting in the little church, with its small pews one behind another on either side of the narrow single aisle that led from the door of the church to the altar, read his Prayer Book and yawned a little through the readings, trying to dodge the evil eye of Lanes and his

friends, and being glad to be out at last and away home again.

This business of church attendance had no importance whatever in his life, nor, so far as he could judge, in his mother's. One heard about God, but heard nothing that was new, nor that made this God referred to a figure, in any degree comprehensible. Sometimes, all the same, Daniel felt a little wistful. Once, during the sermon, the giant, withdrawing from the Burial Service at the amen, had wakened enough to hear the declaration on the preacher's lips that " God heard us when we addressed Him." Without knowing how to express his idea in so many words, Daniel assumed the Vicar's words to be so much rhetoric, the employment of which was, so far as his hearer was able to observe, necessary for the purpose of one's doing the work for which one was paid. But, if the words had really had an intent, then the idea that one must be supposed to accept was that, not only the man in the pulpit, but persons of Daniel's class, had a right to address themselves to God. Daniel told himself that he would have liked to be allowed to address God. He could then have asked why, since there was a purpose in everything, he was so tall, when often boys and young men were just ordinary. But he could have asked something else which was really more important, the question he had submitted to the Vicar long ago. What one was in this life was not so important, for one was not here for long; but in the next world one went on for ever. *Must one be a giant in the next world?*

Yes, he would have liked to ask God. But where was his clear authority to approach the great sovereign Deity? He could not imagine that it really existed. Parsons said so many things that they would be the first to declare must not be interpreted ignorantly, that is, in a plain straightforward manner. For instance, the Vicar from Stowe would say, " Blessed are the peace-makers," and then ask why more young men from the village had not joined the army when the recruiters had been about. Or a parson would say that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (and, as Daniel knew, even a fly couldn't go through

the eye of a needle) than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But he had never heard it suggested that the old Squire, who was a very rich man, went anywhere else, though the Squire had been a hard as well as a rich man, and in his younger days had had poachers transported.

So that he could not see that the Vicar had any meaning in his mind when he said they all equally had a right to speak to God. Gentlemen could talk to God: that was probably it, God was a gentleman; and if there was anything a poor man wanted he would be supposed to ask the parson to speak to Him. Just as when there was a job going at the Big House, an out-of-work labourer would ask the parson to put in a word for him. But ordinarily you knew your place; and your place wasn't near God.

There had been moments during recent bitter experiences, as well as during a moment of rapture, when Daniel had wondered whether, if he spoke, God would hear. But he decided that he had better do nothing. He was not sure that, having made a giant, God approved of His handiwork. He certainly had not seemed to care much for Goliath.

And so Daniel, first tortured by the boys at home, and now enduring the nightly agony of exhibition, told himself that he must not trouble God.

Also he told himself that he owed nothing to God: nothing.

CHAPTER XVII

I

HE stumbled on clumsily now, while the bells smote upon his ears, though with no appeal for him. He was merely forlorn, broken in spirit.

The spark of life was for him a poor smouldering. . . .

He came to a bridge. Below lay the dead, black waters of a canal. He gazed into it with a sudden surprise. Surely he had gone out upon a quest? Without realising it he had been looking for something. Was this it? And then he laughed in his soul at the bitter irony of a question that presented itself: how did he know that the canal was deep enough? It was doubtless deep enough for others. But was it for an Exhibited Giant?

He was about to turn away, when he heard a thin, reedy, male voice speaking in his ear.

"Will you come to the service, young man?"

Daniel turned and discovered an odd-looking, little, old man, in what must have been, though the giant had not the perception for such facts, the worst-fitting frock-coat in the town, and with sleeves that were too short. He wore, too, large, noisy, square-toed boots, much polished; and was in what was easily recognisable, even to Daniel, as "Sunday best." He had a tuft of grey goatee beard, and a shaven upper lip, and his nails, trimmed by a clasp-knife, consorted badly with his big white cuffs. He was eyeing the giant in a sort of authoritative way, as if he took for granted that his invitation must be accepted. He had, as a matter of fact, long ago discovered that, in work of this sort, knowing your own mind was half-way to controlling other people's.

"Service?" repeated Daniel. He didn't want to go to any service: he wanted to be let alone.

"Yes. Along 'ere." The little man nodded towards the big square shape of a building on the further side of the bridge that, in the dusk, hid the balder facts of its construction, and may have been glad to do so.

"I went in there one night thirty years ago—didn't want to. I was a wild lad, drinking and dicing" (the little man, like all the best of his kind, painted his own vices with an attractive gusto). "Yes, I was an evil liver. But I went in that door that night and I've praised 'Im ever since. I've lived in spiritual 'ealth from then to now. If you want bodily 'ealth there's nothing like shin beef, as I've always said. And if you want the best kind of spiritual 'ealth, get right with 'Im."

The thought that crossed Daniel's mind was "Dissent." Probably the building was a "chapel"; his mother had taught him to suspect these dissenting institutions. There had been one in Oldborne. If the chapel happened to empty at the same moment as the church, its respective congregations eyed one another darkly, as dogs do across a street; although an individual member of one group would meet a member of another, the next day, at market, or across a shop counter, with the most perfect good-will.

The little man who had addressed Daniel now stood waiting. And constrained at last by his manner, the giant made a move. He had no active intention of going anywhere; but he now came across the bridge, his guide pedalling along in his squeaky boots, like an ostler leading a horse. What had given the giant an impulse to oblige was that the little man had not seemed to stare, while he had certainly made no allusion to his height.

When they had crossed the bridge Daniel discovered, by the light of a big gas lamp hanging from the entrance to the building, that the place *was* a "chapel" of some sort. People were crowding in. He thought they would have looked at him; but they did *not*—as he saw, presently, with relief; they were too much engrossed in getting into the building. Apparently there was already little enough

room, and to this the small man seemed to be murmuring a reference.

"There bain't any need to worrit yourself for me," said Daniel. "I weren't comin'."

"Oh, but you was, young man. You're a brand plucked from the burnin'. *I* plucked you," with a funny little air of asserting proprietorship, "so you jest come along in and hear the good news."

"Good news?" repeated Daniel. Where was there ever any good news for him?

"Yes." The little man, trying to take his arm, could reach only to his thigh. "Come in and hear what the Lord has to say to you."

"But I tell you, mister, I—I don't want to be—noticed. There be rather a lot o' me."

"Come!" The imperative grew strangely operative. The giant was moving towards the steps. "I'll find yer a seat be'ind the organ or somewhere. Nobody 'll see yer there. We often puts worse'n you there."

"But don't you go thinkin' I've done suffen," Daniel began to protest.

The old man looked him over in the gaslight as they ascended the last step. "Then what you want is only not to be seen?"

He was plainly at a loss, and the heart of poor Daniel warmed to him. Here was somebody who could see no difference between him and the rest of mankind; who could suppose that his wanting privacy could only be a result of a crime on his conscience. Daniel could have embraced the ugly little man, who could not see that he had a freak at his side; who only supposed that he had brought in a fellow-creature; a brand from the burning.

"Look here," said Daniel, "why did you ask me to come along?"

"'Cause I ask everybody I see on my way to chapel, young man. And I saw you, and I thinks, there's a young man that might be all the better for the good tidings."

Nobody had ever talked to Daniel like this about religion, and like most young men he felt uncomfortable. But the

old man's funny sincerity, and still more his ignorance of the oddity of his companion's appearance, made Daniel tolerant, and even quite submissive, while he was being conducted into the vestibule. The little man, who seemed to know various stewards standing about, pushed his way among the people crowding in, and Daniel was about to follow, when he drew back. He was to be led down an aisle! Instantly he became sick with apprehension and turned to escape. His leader came back.

"What's the matter?" he whispered.

"I can't go in there with all their eyes——"

"Why can't you? Nothing wrong with you, young man, is there? Ye look like everybody else, don't you now!"

Oh, the music of those words! "Do I?" he murmured. But he knew he didn't.

His guide, however, had already turned towards the door.

"We'll get in this way," he said; and leading the way down the steps and against the flood-tide of incomers, he piloted his tall companion round the building to a back entrance, through which, also, crowds seemed to be pushing their way. Presently Daniel found himself upon a chair, placed in a dim recess behind the organ and pulpit. Here he sat with a small group of other persons who, in the half-light, scarcely gave him a glance. Perhaps even if lights had rendered him conspicuous they would not have noticed him. For as the giant looked before him at the people assembled in the big yellow pews, that ran from wall to wall, save where narrow aisles cut them, and from front to back of a huge gallery ascending to the very roof, he began to be caught by an idea. This was no ordinary religious service. The people, who were of every class from middle downwards, seemed to be impressed by some single idea. It struck Daniel that the grey-headed man in handsome black with the gold watch-chain who sat in the front pew, and who might well be of the order of bankers, and the little shrivelled woman with the yellow pea-nut of a face peeping from the shawl drawn tightly over her head, who was to be seen in the front row of the gallery, would, if brought

together, instinctively talk of the same thing, the phenomenon of this religious proceeding.

Daniel's curiosity grew. From curiosity he passed to wistfulness. Here were these people, and from their secret, whatever it might be, he alone was excluded. He was no judge of men, and so the fine shades of character which distinguished one face from another in that great assembly of faces was lost upon him.

He did not realise that the face of the banker was merely that of a commonly successful man, but that the long, lean countenance, pale as death, with pendulous lower lip and staring eyes, of a man just behind the banker was a more curious type, that might carry a story behind it.

What Daniel saw was something that was common to all faces, a hunger for something that perhaps they might hear of in this place; and, as the minutes were ticked away by the big clock somewhere near this organ platform, there rose a general expectancy. Daniel could feel this eagerness communicating itself to his small companion, and presently, half-rising, the little man, with a slightly ludicrous air of drama, whispered:

"'E'll be 'ere in a minute now." The allusion, as Daniel did not doubt, was to the preacher. He asked no question.

The next moment a door opened immediately in front of where he and his companion sat, and a young man in frock-coat and white choker stepped out. Daniel could see very little of his face until the young man had moved forward into the light, and for a moment the giant supposed that here went an usher. But his uncertainty was removed at once by his guide whispering with a strained excitement, "That's *'im*; yes—'im."

Daniel did not say "Who?" He didn't care. All he knew was that there was intense excitement now in every face, and that he was caught by it. He looked at the pulpit, and there before him, to his astonishment, he saw that the young man was not merely young for a preacher, but quite astonishingly youthful. He was scarcely to be called tall (Daniel always noted that detail first when judging a man), and for one of his years, which could not have

exceeded twenty-four or five, he was somewhat stout. His hair was straw colour; and when, looking round the hall on first entering the pulpit, he offered a view of his face to those sitting where Daniel sat, he was seen to have broad features, blue eyes, and a square chin with a large powerful mouth. The glance was assured, and for a moment its assurance offended Daniel—when suddenly the man, looking into the body of the hall, spoke. He used his lips merely to give out a hymn, but the effect upon Daniel was immediate. He was won by a voice that thrilled him to his core. And taking in with a glance the hushed crowd before him, Daniel knew that they were one with himself, caught up in the magic of a human voice. Standing up with the knowledge that there were none behind him to nudge his neighbour and point to the giant in front, Daniel shared a hymn-book with his odd, old guide. The words could scarcely be read in the place where they stood, and the difference in their heights made a level for holding the book convenient to both nearly impossible to achieve. But the little man seemed to know the words, though to Daniel they were new.

"Washed in the blood of the Lamb,"

chorused the great crowd. The whole sang as one. Daniel was far too absorbed now to look about: all this was thrilling beyond expression. His heart was lifted. He did not know that in that whole congregation no single face suggested that the mind behind it remained detached.

"Washed in the blood of the Lamb."

The congregation sang the last verse and sank down into its pews with a sigh as of ecstasy, or of regret that they were not to sing their song for ever. And now there rose in Daniel's ear the voice of the young man again. First there was a prayer, then a reading—David's lament over Saul. To an instructed intelligence it must have seemed that the young preacher was not unconscious that here he had opportunity for that voice of his. But Daniel was rejoicing for an odd cause. It was David's lament, *not* David's triumph song over Goliath. For Daniel had never

been able to bear the tale of Goliath with its execration of that elongated Philistine. . . . Goliath, he never could forget, was a giant. . . .

After the reading there was something the like of which Daniel had never heard. It was a prayer. And public prayer, as Daniel understood it, was a matter of reading from a book. But this very young man did not read from a book. He seemed to be talking to God as if he knew Him. In other circumstances Daniel would have been inclined to question the proceeding. But so caught up was he in his present atmosphere that he accepted the oddity of the experience as part of the thrill.

But then this very young man seemed to be telling God about the people who were in the pews. "A man came in here to-night, O Lord, with his heart broken. He was sick of the life Thou hadst given him. He had stood looking into the water and trying to find the courage to plunge in. He hides from himself that to do so is to plunge not into forgetfulness but into Hell."

Daniel trembled: something was catching at his heart. The voice of the preacher rolled on. And as it did so other voices in the hall broke into ejaculations, "amens" very deep and long: once a woman screamed, and it seemed as if somebody was being assisted to the door, because the aisles, being packed with chairs, one could hear these chairs one by one being lifted or thrust aside as a distressed soul was led to the air outside.

When heads were raised again, there was a marked change in their faces. There was a unifying spiritual certainty. Distinguishing marks were being eliminated: in a sense the stiffer lines of character were being effaced; souls were being standardised. And this fact the young preacher seemed to recognise. The hearts of these people were being prepared for his message. He had asked that they should be, and now they were passing through the process. A second reading, this time the story of Lazarus; a hymn, a prayer, and then another hymn constituted the further exercises. And with each the atmosphere grew tenser: the process of standardisation continued more effectively.

The men and women who sat so tightly assembled became more completely mere units of a whole.

Without completely realising what was happening, Daniel felt himself caught and embraced by this atmosphere. He had begun by thinking of himself as that wretch who had contemplated self-destruction, who had trembled on the brink of Hell. But he was too sick with the memory of old humiliations not to remember why, for a moment, he had thought of ending his life. And the second prayer, which exhibited the man in the pulpit in still more familiar intercourse with his Maker, was a reminder to the Divine Being addressed that He was the Consoler of the afflicted, the Healer of the sick, the God of Love. The giant, stooping awkwardly in his dark corner, felt soothed and aided. But he did not know why—indeed so absorbed was he by this time, so much a part of the whole, that it did not occur to him to ask a question.

After a further hymn, the people sat down and instantly began settling themselves, as if now they would not be moving for some time.

This was, Daniel recognised, a sign that the sermon was to begin.

But, if he had known it, if he had not been too much absorbed to observe the fact, the manner of these people preparing for the sermon was very different from that of the village congregation at Oldborne, whose notion was one of settlement and comfort and perhaps of provision for stolen slumbers. *These* folk braced themselves; their eyes concentrated on the pulpit; they drew in deep breaths as men do when about to make an effort. For they were not at ease: they were bracing themselves for the effort to catch every word. They were surrendered entirely to that very young man; they were his instrument: for him many had tramped over weary city miles and would tramp back again. They were his.

He seemed to know it. For a moment he looked about him slowly, as if mastering the details of his scene; his survey even extended to those few who, in darkness, sat behind him; and as his scrutiny visited Daniel, the giant

again caught a glimpse of that wide face with its large, generous mouth and strong throat. Then looking into his crowd again, the young man opened his lips. First he gave out a text: "The same shall be saved!" Then followed a few words explanatory of the circumstances in which the words were first spoken—and then the young preacher entered upon his subject. The fluency, the grace, the rich vocabulary of the best Anglo-Saxon, the thrilling softness and glowing colour of the voice combined to make an effect upon the heart of Daniel such as he had never known.

There was much about Hell, because in Daniel's day, as the preachers would have explained, a robust doctrine was not laid aside to conciliate souls whom it offended. Hell was there, and presented as flaring and terrible, so that many trembled; and among them, Daniel.

"'Where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.' And that must inevitably be your end. At the last trump. And that trump *will* sound for *you*. At the last trump, when we shall all stand before the Throne of God, you will hear those awful words, blasting for ever your hope in eternity, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.' There are some, here, in this hall, who will hear those words." An awful shudder convulsed the congregation. It caught Daniel, so that a sob broke from him. The preacher hearing it half turned. "There are some who, if they will listen to-day, need never hear those terrible words; for whom there is grace, if they will but use it."

A little sigh as of struggling hope flew from the throats of many, and uniting made a clear note in that tense air. And presently the speaker, passing from talk of the world to come, turned to the love of God. "He gave His Son. Can we not in return give our poor all? Some of us believe ourselves to be martyrs to duty." (Daniel strained an ear.) "Can we not consent to suffer when He suffered? Shall we not hang upon our Cross when He has hung upon His?

"We are poor and worthless and yet He died for us, gave Himself for us. Shall we refuse Him? Sweetly and tenderly He says to us, I died for you, I want you—*YOU*."

The voice of the preacher became a cry. "Shall we turn from Him? Shall we be among those who in the last day are told, 'I never knew you'? Or shall we be listening; shall we say, 'Lord, I come; Thou who died for me, what can I do for Thee?' Or shall we reject Him, pierce His dear heart with grief?"

Daniel was immensely moved. He wanted to speak; to cry out. The agony was more than he could bear, and it was not the fear of Hell but of repelling a love so divine, a love that had been great enough to surrender life, and endure torture on the Cross, that burdened his heart now so intolerably. He had never known, he cried in his heart! He must come to Christ, to God. But how? Yes, the speaker was telling him, the speaker was drawing to a close, was making his final, most searching appeal. But so far as Daniel went the anguish of the appeal was already caught. This Jesus who had done so much for him, now had all that he could give. Only how could he tell Him? How make known his surrender? And there were all the past years (less than an hour ago he had told himself that he owed God nothing), the past years in which he had never known nor never realised what he owed to his Saviour. He must be assured that he was forgiven for that neglect. But how to be assured? Oh, if only the preacher could see him! . . .

But the preacher was making an announcement. "If any dear heart needed help . . ." there was an inquiry room open. Still the preacher spoke, pleaded, *cried* for hearts to yield. And all over the hall now men groaned and women sobbed. At last the young man, looking about him, made his final demand. All that were willing to surrender that night, to make Christ their Saviour, must stand up. "Just rise and let the rising be the sign. . . ."

One of the first upon his feet was Daniel.

In the crowded inquiry room, already steaming with human breath, to which his odd companion led him with a sort of triumph, like a sportsman carrying a trophy, Daniel came face to face with the preacher.

There were many others thronging the room, but the

little old man seemed to have some kind of authority, for the preacher recognised him, and after giving Daniel a quick look, drew the giant into a corner. A moment later the pair were on their knees. Daniel knew nothing of whether he was observed: cared nothing. He had but one completely mastering thought: to give himself to the Jesus that "it do seem have done all," and to know that he was accepted.

When he rose and came to the exit his face was shining. But the men and women here assembled were too much engrossed in their own spiritual distress to notice him.

At the door he turned to his quaint, small friend, who still kept him in sight.

"That do be a blessed thing that you done, sir, to bring me here."

"Aye. 'E will ever use the poorest instruments for 'Is own purposes. Even *I* 'ave been used. And now, young man, go 'ome and give thanks to 'Im."

"Home?" Only now did Daniel remember. "I only be staying here," he said.

"And I were going to say that you must come to our chapel always now. But you ain't stopping? Ah, well—and what brings you to this town, young man?"

"I be with—with the show." He wondered how the old man would take it. But the old man passed no comment but an, "Aye, indeed." In the bottom of Daniel's poor heart there had momentarily sprung a hope that this old Christian would use words forbidding him to exhibit himself in a show in future. But no, he must go back to his caravan. When they had crossed the bridge, the old man said that his way must take him from his new friend; and so the pair shook hands. Between them was now a divine secret of which the casual passer-by could know nothing.

"And"—for the question had been in Daniel's mind to ask—"what were the name of that gentleman that preached?"

The old man stared at his companion under the light of a flickering lamp.

"What! you don't even know that?"

"No, sir. I certainly do not. Did I ought to do that?"

"Young man," the words were spoken solemnly, "that bearer of the good news is young like you. But there are more in this world already to bless his name than have blessed the names of most thrice his age. That is the celebrated Mr. Spurgeon."

II

As he took his way in the darkness back to the camp, Daniel found that his heart, that had been very heavy, was light: his soul, that had been humiliated, was exalted. He wanted to cry out; for had he not been reconciled to his Saviour?

And yet, as he told himself, "it do seem strange loike." Two hours ago he had not realised any need for a reconciliation. He had come there burdened with an earthly burden, and that burden remained precisely where it had lain before. So far as he understood, this was what had happened: the weight of his earthly burden had been suddenly and overwhelmingly increased; then the increased weight had been removed; and now, for the moment, he hardly realised the old weight.

Actually he had got a new perspective; a new criterion. He lifted his eyes to the sky. The lights of the dim street lamps in those days were not powerful enough to blot out the heavens from the view of people walking the streets of a city. And Daniel looked up, his vision uninterrupted. Up there God dwelt. What had been stars, strange lamps of the universe, were now the lights that hung about the outer courts of his eternal home. It seemed to Daniel that if he could but have ascended, as Elijah had done, straight up into the face of that overhanging glory, it would have been all-satisfying.

But he must go on: he must still be an exhibit in a show. He must suffer still. It would not be easy to suffer; but when Jesus had hung upon a cross, must he complain if also there was a cross for him? . . .

When he reached the caravan he stood still, listening. And then he heard the sound of a heavy snore. The dwarf was sleeping off his Sunday drinking bout.

The giant crept up the stairs, and, treading softly, made his way to his bunk. He had removed his coat, when he remembered that there was something he must do to-night that he had not done for years.

He lowered himself to his knees.

CHAPTER XVIII

THROUGHOUT the next day the giant found himself reacting to the thought of his new great experience. The gigantic fact of life with its million alleys of experience had momentarily lain beneath a rose-tinted cloud that blotted out all unhappy reminders of the existence which he must endure. But now thoughts of this martyrdom began again to rise up.

Well, he had now One to help him to endure. For he must still suffer. He bowed his head. But he raised it again, as if he would avoid something. He must bear witness. He shrank back; he could not do it. And yet of one thing the young preacher had reminded him last night: he must "show his colours."

"Of course," that young man had observed, "it will not be difficult for a man of your height. None would dare insult *you;* but by standing out you will perhaps be helping a weaker brother."

The unsuspected irony was delicious, if Daniel had been able to enjoy it. *He* was the weaker brother. He was so weak a brother, indeed, that he could not speak.

He took his Bible.

"Freely ye have received, freely give. . . ." Out of the page the words seemed to blaze so that he could read no other message. All the written promises of peace seemed specifically denied to his heart. When, standing on the steps of the caravan, he looked about him to where the spires of the city pointed him to Heaven, he thought they did so with a reservation—as if they had a suggestion to offer to others which they must deny to him. Or if he lifted his eye at night to the stars that had seemed friends, and that now should be more his friends than ever, with their secrets of

the place of the Most High, he saw that they looked down austerely upon him—that poor traitor.

There were times when he grew rebellious. Why must he tell these people? . . . But there was another protest in his heart. For the thought had come that not only to these, but to others, must he communicate the new great fact in his life. His mother . . . he doubted if he could ever write to her of this theme. . . . And then there was Mabel. He could *never* write to Mabel. . . .

Night after night Daniel, on his wretched couch, revolved the abasing fact of his own cowardice. A great gift, nothing less than the gift of eternal life, had been given to him. The gift was at the disposal of all the world if it but knew. And he would not do anything to spread the news!

Then one morning he rose before the dwarf was awake. He wanted to pray. So far he had only once dared to do so on his knees. He stepped across and cast an eye upon that red, dreadful face, which even with the terrible dead eyes closed seemed to retain a sort of brutal authority.

For a moment Daniel gazed, and then he crept to his own corner. Once more he looked round, and then lowered himself gently to the kneeling position. He had but extended his arms when he heard a movement, and then a loud, dreadful laugh.

"Pious, eh?" The words undoubtedly issued from the dwarf, though he was not sitting up.

"Don't know what you mane." Daniel was on his feet and flushing miserably.

"On yer marrows, weren't yer?" said the thick voice.

"I—I dropped somethin'."

He wanted to withdraw that lie; to own the truth; to confess himself the base poltroon that he was. And yet he crept out, his face suffused with shame, while a low laugh came from where the dwarf lay. All the morning and afternoon he went about the show grounds, beginning to approach the dwarf whenever he saw him and resolved to wipe out the shame and dishonour done to his Lord; and then retreating again. He told himself he wanted a new

chance to be thrust upon him; for then he could find just enough courage to confess.

It was then that he wandered across the path of Bligh, that man from whom he had fled and in whose presence he always trembled. Bligh, who, as he often did, stopped, arms akimbo.

"What!" said the supplanted, "what's this we 'ear? Got religion, 'as it? Got religion!"

"I—I don't know what you mane." Daniel, evading his challenge, passed on.

And in his heart he was crying out upon his shame.

He had failed again. Ah, he had failed: he had shut his eyes to the sight of the dying Christ; his ears to the sweet murmurs of that tender Saviour. For the second time he had been false to his trust.

He beheld the sad eyes of the Crucified looking down upon him: he had bruised his Lord: nay, his hand had driven a nail into the body of God. He was a traitor, with no longer a right to the boons and graces that were the Christian's. He turned away, and, leaving the show grounds, made his way into a suburb and so to a country lane. But when he looked into the young spring hedgerows for a consolation that once had not failed him, he could find it not. Could he not return to Bligh? Or seek him out? But he quietened himself. He would meet them all at the meal called "tea" with which Chicknick prepared his staff for the work of the evening. Generally Daniel sat at the end of the table, as far away as he could from the dwarf and Bligh, who often, however, were absent. They were absent to-night when he went in; and he accused himself for the relief with which he found that he could postpone that confession. But he was not so easily to escape.

The cadaverous Bingle, his thin, fine, melancholy face dimly lighted by a smile, put the challenge:

"What's all this about you getting religion, Little 'Un?"

Daniel looked round hurriedly. They were, he thought, all listening. Even Chicknick at the other end of the table put down his knife and waited, his hard face seeming to reflect no comment; his iron mouth fixed in immutable

indifference. They were all waiting, and Daniel had not spoken.

It was Madame who took the question from Bingle.

"Yes, Mr. Spruce," she always called the dwarf by his name, "Mr. Spruce 'as been telling us——"

"There's nothing to tell." Daniel was sure that it was his own voice, the voice of that forsworn traitor, Daniel Windmill, which, for the third time that day, spoke a denial. But he held to his words. "It's Big 'Un's joke—that's what it be. Saw me stooping when I wore lookin' for suffen this mornin'——"

Just then Blowser, the cook, thrust in with the treacle pudding.

Daniel took the chance, got to his feet and went to the tent door, where, for a moment, he stood looking up into the hard high night sky. And, as he went, from somewhere remote in the darkness a cock crew.

And Daniel went out and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XIX

DANIEL knew now that he must speak and that no agony of self-consciousness was like this agony of shame and contrition that wrung him. Like Peter he had denied three times. At whatever cost now he would make his confession. But when and how? He could not go back there. Besides, they would all be returned to their caravans. For an hour had passed while he had been in the darkness, walking to and fro in misery and shame of heart.

What, then, must he do? And while he sought for an answer to his question he heard a lurching step. He peered before him and knew the figure by its motion rather than in its detail.

"It do be you?" he said aloud, meaning that it was Bligh.

"What?" the voice rising into the ready sneer. "What? *That* thing again?"

"Yes. That thing. Bligh, it do be true what you ask me. You know. What you call 'got religion.' I've—I've given myself to Jesus Christ." And having made that confession he turned and fled.

He felt that he could not do otherwise. He had at least ceased to be a traitor. But now he must go on.

There was still Spruce to be dealt with, and the dwarf presented the most difficult problem of all.

Daniel decided that he would now let the opportunity come rather than force it.

In Daniel's bag was a Bible. He had used it much secretly of late. His mother had put it among his things in obedience, as he supposed, to some direction of a conventional religious sentiment. And he had valued it at no more than that. But now, returning to his caravan, he took out the

bag and, though the dwarf sat eyeing him out of his dreadful, dead eye, he brought forth the Bible. He did so tremblingly, and wished that even now he might escape. But he recognised that it was a confession in itself. And for such it was taken.

" 'Ello ! " The dwarf so announced himself, and then resounded with internal laughter. When he had thought of a word or two more he spoke again.

" Getting religious, eh ? "

" I have been changed," Daniel admitted. " It do make a deal o' difference. And oh, Big 'Un, I wish, I can't help wishing, that you'd been where I wore t'other night an' heard the good news." He took a deep breath. " It *do* make a difference," concluded this unpractised evangelist.

" Oh, aye ? " agreed the dwarf, eyeing the other without change of the dead blue eyes. There was a note of interest in his voice, which ought to have warned the giant.

" Yes, Big 'Un, I'd sure like to take you and show you the way to meeting—only I fear I bain't fitted," with a nervous self-depreciatory laugh, " to show you what be wanted in a man before the Lord accept him. Big 'Un, if I could only git you——"

Suddenly, though his eyes still stared in that dead way, the dwarf resumed his deep throaty laugh. The effect was rather horrible, for it seemed as if the laughter was completely detached from his humanity.

Daniel stared at him in fixed horror. Of the dwarf in this mood he could make nothing. Consulting his own new heart he decided that this was not the expedient moment. He slipped away.

But his duty to his fellows of the show weighed heavily upon him. If only he could find the acceptable word. The trouble was that it had been as much as he could do to get them to take him seriously in normal times. There had, for instance, been the fat woman, who had decoyed him to sit beside her on the steps of her caravan one moonlight night after the show, and who had begun by calling him " dear." He remembered with a sort of sick distaste how she had told him that he could hold her hand if he liked.

Those great red hands with rings on them, oozing out of her tight sleeves, were offered to the touch of one with memories of a little, soft, brown hand over at Stowe. He had got up and left her with a hurriedly invented excuse that did not deceive her, and the obvious fact of the invention of which had turned her into an enemy.

But perhaps now he ought to go to her, tell her of her danger, of how easy reconciliation was with God. . . . He shuddered. He could not go to her. And he fell to considering others. There was that woman's antithesis. More easily might he get in a word with the skeleton, Bingle.

He hastened to the caravan of the thin man, and there saw him with his heavy eyes and consistently yellow skin. Bingle received his visitor, as he did everyone, with mournful civility.

"Come into my quarters," he said. "There isn't much room, but I don't require much. I'd require less, if Chicknick could work it and yet keep me alive. But that's where I've got him always. When he says, take off another pound, I can always answer, 'Very well, Mr. Chicknick, I will; but as my coffin will be wanted I'd like to see what you're going to put on it.'"

"But I want to talk to you, Fatty," faltered Daniel. "I mane that do be so important—what 'ud happen to you if you did die!"

"Chick 'ud be in the cart proper."

"No, I don't mean that—I mean to *you*."

Bingle looked up. "You wanter talk religion to me," he said, almost sullenly.

"I do that," cried Daniel. "I want to tell you some good news. It be suffen that make me very happy. I want *you* to be happy."

And so he talked nervously, eagerly. He had never thought he could. He was a little astonished by his own fluency. . . .

He did not know until long afterwards that the talk thus begun became, in the mind of Bingle, an event in the thin record of a life. What he did know, as he went "homewards" to his caravan, was that, at last, he was not found faithless.

CHAPTER XX

ONE glorious morning Daniel had a letter from Mabel. It gave him great and unexpected delight in so far as, for the first time, as he phrased it in his own mind, she *asked*. There was no single word of disdain of him because he went in a travelling show and was nightly set up on a platform for men to stare at. In the first, unwilling letter she had sent him, in reply to three of his beseeching an answer, she had hinted derisions, so far as it was possible for one using so inept a pen to be less than direct. There had been a hideously memorable postscript: "When you be a-comin' hereabouts I'll have to save up sixpence to go and see the Freak."

He had told himself that he had certainly lost her as a sweetheart, even if, by a great persistence, he still sometimes drew a rough little letter out of her. So long as he went about on show she would refuse to call him a man, or think of him as such. . . . A freak. . . . He was a freak. For his mother's sake, and at total sacrifice of his manhood, he was, and must remain, a freak.

But there was no word here, in this letter that now she wrote to him, of such a taunt.

He could almost rightfully see in this message a bridge crossing over the stream of her contempt and joining the present with that sundered area in his mind occupied by gracious memories of her maidenly friendship.

The very best that he had had from her before had been a note, in a vein of bored acquiescence with his continuing to address her at all.

She would not welcome his writing to her, while she declined the positive action of ordering him to cease. Usually she had not troubled to reply; and, when she did,

she wrote briefly and badly. But the letter which now she wrote, though it was short enough when measured by his, definitely exposed an active emotion. And he, who had long accepted the relationship which she had imposed, was now suddenly transfixed with delight. She wrote—oh, amazement for Daniel!—asking for a love-letter! "One of them that you wrote before. I'm not much at writing myself, Daniel dear, I'm not clever like you." (*He* clever!) "And I can't, somehow, a-set down the things that come into my head. But you be a rare hand at it. So, Daniel dear, please write. And you needn't say so much about Religion, because I go to church regular. Only tell me about what you think about me, and I remain your loving Mabel."

For the first time she had asked him to declare his love! In the overpowering sweetness of the situation in which, for the first time, he found himself, he was ready to play with the idea that perhaps he would *not* write to her for a day or two, so that he could see himself for a moment the complete master of her heart, before he sat down to get off a letter to her before nightfall.

This pleasant self-deception could not, however, be maintained for a full hour, so much did his hand itch to write. And so he got himself into the caravan; and, finding that the dwarf was out, he set paper on a flat board propped on his knee, and wrote.

Framed in the dim doorway of the caravan was a high, wide, dark sky—God's garment, jewelled here and there with a star. Daniel could remember such a sky in days of his lesser fortune, when he had not his present assurance of Mabel's love. And in that mood of exaltation he wrote. It was such a letter as he had never written to her before, because it was the first love-letter for which she had asked. He was very sorry that she had tried to forbid the mention of the matter nearest to his heart, but he consoled himself with the thought that now that she had given herself to him clearly and of her own will, there would be many chances of his speaking the word. She would hear gladly because she would hear everything that he told her. And so, immensely consoled, he wrote the tale he had tried, in more restrained

form, to tell her before. First there was delight to be recorded, delight that she had bidden him write. Then there was a passage about himself and his own ploys, since these must, the happy lover argued, inevitably be of interest to her. Finally, there came what he loved most to write—his celebration of her beauty. " I've travelled a good bit now, Mabel dear—up and down country. A man that do that, little love, see a lot of girls in the street. I seen a lot myself. They come to the show to look at our lion and tiger." Somehow he could not say " to see our freaks."

" But there never be one like you—never one with a voice of honey like what yours is, and soft and sweet beyond believing like. And you are that lovely, my dear, with your beautiful hair all colour and glistening, and like a mystery. You do fare to be far above rubies as the Good Book say. Oh, my dear, when I write of the Good Book, how I want you to be His that make that Book—how I would like to know that you were sealed and safe, and trusting only to One what has done all for you. But I write of what you ask me not to. So I'll just hope that when I see you I'll be able to speak of these things to you, little love.

" And that time when I shall see you may not be so far away after all, for here we are in Lincoln and going to Spalding, and Norwich; and Norwich to Gippeswick is not very far, and we'll be there in not much more than a month. And then see if I don't go by Doddery and find you in yours! For that won't seem right now, waiting about while we meet in the cruel dark beside rattling huts. But my love will do me much honour, and let me into hers, and come to mine. Yes, she'll let me enter within her gates. She receive me like a queen, and me all humble that such as she love me, will come in to her.

" My dear, you do be a very fair maiden, more beautiful than a star, and your beauty shine to me all over the long lands and weary that lie between us. For now I know what I did not know once, that you do need me. And now no more from your loving Daniel.

" *PS.* John iii. 16. You'll not mind me just mentioning that, little love, will you? "

The answer to this was brief as usual. But it was in the vein of her previous letter, and so he held that and pressed the little, blotted missive with its light of human feeling so tragically dim, its voice of love's reality so faint, and with only the note of a mean little egotism actually triumphant.

And there were tears in his eyes as at the sight of a treasure beyond human appreciation.

The letter demanded to be told again and again what it was that she signified to him.

" I do like you, Daniel dear, to say what I be like and what you would do to me if we was to get married and living in a little house of our own. And what you would do that nobody else ever do. And you could tell me, if you liked, how much you would give me, and all the money you would spend if you had it."

The last suggestion a little puzzled Daniel. Neither in this, nor in his previous letter had she hinted, even vaguely, that she remembered in what way he was employed. The character of his employment seemed to be merely irrelevant to her present theme, which, so far as a loving mind could deduce it, seemed to be her need for his letters and for his assurances of what she signified in his mind.

But what did or could she mean by her reference to " all the money you could spend if . . ." ?

Did she assume him to have transferred himself to a less sorry employment ? That was a torturing thought. Or did she mean that she accepted him as he was, that she was prepared to be the wife of a freak ? . . .

He wrote to her and, in anxiously arranged words, contrived a question. " You do think, do you not, little love, that it be right for me to stay where I be for *the present ?* " He did not know why he underlined that, but he did. It occurred to him that there was a promise of some change in the future. But he would not over-trouble himself about the future. Much might happen in the future.

It is noticeable that in this new flood-tide of happiness the giant no longer considered his own growing weakness. He was like a man swimming with the running sea, who never

asks himself whether he is holding his strength, or whether, rather, he has not mistaken the flood behind him for his own physical force. He went about as if borne up by some aerial chariot, being so noticeably exalted that Bligh, ruminating orally and noisily in the hearing of the dwarf, observed: "That thing 'll be going through it before long now, so 'e can well make the most of whatever's pleasing 'im!"

This sentiment evoked no comment from the impenetrable Spruce, who merely sat, gazing into space with those dead eyes of his.

But Chicknick, watching Daniel, was not in the least puzzled. That valuable exhibit, if it did not eat and drink more, was going to give him the slip. The fellow was alive; seemingly more lively than he'd been for weeks, and there was doubtless an explanation of that somewhere. But this liveliness was spoof only. If he was living, he was living on his remaining strength. And he was not always able even to make a show of doing that. There was unnatural colour in the young man's cheeks. Kindness could be wasteful, but there was such a thing as looking after one's goods and investments.

This particular unit of the various investments of the proprietor of Chicknick's "*World's Best Exhibition and Menagerie*" was becoming elusive. While he presented his body to his master for each performance, he seemed to dwell outside the show grounds altogether.

Chicknick was inclined to believe in a grievance. He had a brutally-healthy man's morbid distaste for anything that hinted of another world. And mingling with his increasing mental protest against Daniel's general attitude to life, he began to see his exhibit in terms of what he called "hymns and death-beds." Now Daniel was paid to live, and paid well. He was not going to be allowed to ride off with a reedy-voiced assurance that "I be all right, sir—I do be, ralely."

In the meantime Daniel was in a condition of what seemed to him unbelievable happiness. His dear was now truly

his : she had owned herself as such : in a few weeks he would see her. And a week held only seven days, even if it also held six nights, each still a night of humiliation. He would often now compose in his mind sentences not only for his letters but for utterance when next they should meet.

CHAPTER XXI

THE giant now lived in an atmosphere of such exaltation that the whole world, visible and invisible, seemed joined to bear him up and expand his happiness. He found that what he thought of always as Mabel's confession of love now mitigated even his tortured sense of humiliation as he pulled on his red coat and spangles, that garish uniform of shame, and went to take his place behind the screen, till called forward by Chicknick's unctuous summons. This work, to him, could never be less than a hideous experience; and had he been unsustained by his spiritual happiness on the one hand, and his nervous enjoyment of his girl's surrender to him on the other, he thought sometimes that he must have died, even as Chicknick seemed to fear he would do. He reproached himself sometimes when, searching his heart, as he did so often, he found that it was not the thought of salvation but that of the satisfaction of an earthly passion that gave him his new zest for life.

Death meant going to God; of that he was now assured; and he often thought, with a characteristically fine, ingenuous rapture, of what the first entry into Heaven must be like for the Elect. But what would be his reception there if it could be said that he had not fought gamely enough against Death; but had deliberately allowed himself to die, so that he might content himself with the joys of the after-life while his mother went on battling with the troubles of the present world? His right to Heaven had been established; but might not God say to him, "Why have you come here?"

But now that he had an impulse to live, it was not the thought of his mother that moved him: it was the desire to possess, and to go on possessing, Mabel. Like many another

owner of a conscience, Daniel troubled less about actions than motives. Here he was living, living upon air as the saying was; and the air was the air of an earthly passion of a young man and not that provided by a sense of filial devotion.

He consoled himself a little with the reminder that a man left father and mother to cleave unto his wife. And after all, before long his wife she would be. Inspired by that reminder, Daniel wore such an air of renewal that once or twice even Chicknick was deceived into imagining that his exhibit had been suddenly impressed by the warning of his master to "try."

Daniel, meanwhile, moved by the reminder that he must cleave unto his wife, spent an afternoon telling Mabel that he had been painting mental pictures of her in that wonderful character; and could she say when she thought the thing might be possible? The show was now at Bury, and he wrote that in less than a week "the show come to Ipswich, when I must come over to hers to see my dear that has given her dear self to me, her Daniel. So just wait while then and we will talk about things, for there be a heap to say. And we'll settle when she come to me for ever and always. Oh, my dear——"

He was so moved that he broke off at that point. And so lumbering on its way and filling an unsophisticated countryside with wonder and delight as well as with strange half-spoken suspicions of these show folk, Chicknick's World's Best moved south. Chicknick rode in front on a horse which, for billing purposes, was described as his "fiery Arabian stallion." The fire was a matter, if not of flint, of steel, and steel spurs at that. Otherwise the animal was an amiable, well-fed hack, unwilling to pretend a wickedness it had not, and perhaps a little oppressed by a consciousness of a birthplace no nearer Arabia than the Weald of Essex.

In the wake of that desperate animal making its forced curvetings, there followed the led camel, swaying and odorous, spreading with his nods rumours of a remote desert and perhaps remembering the calm of a past, and surveying a world made futile by the competitive efforts of millions

of men. Then came the unseen cages where crouched the "most ferocious beasts now in Europe, only conveyed to their present state of captivity after struggles in which hundreds of blacks perished"; cages giving off an effluvia queerly, fascinatingly offensive, that blew about the villages through which the procession passed, and intrigued with hints of obscure, dangerous, and not perfectly respectable experiences.

Daniel kept in his caravan. The dwarf had removed himself to travel in Bligh's coach, with whom, and "the lion-tamer," a tragic Assyrian with a Tipperary brogue, and a gentleman holding the office of First Horseman, he played endlessly at cards. Daniel would not be seen. For he knew that to show his face was to expose himself to a scrutiny which might quickly end in "Whoi, *there* do be Daniel Windmill! That be that man from Oldborne that now show as a freak." The crowds hereabouts were particularly interested in him, for was he not everywhere billed as the East Anglian Giant? Did they not claim proprietorship in him? At Lowestoft the fishermen had crowded into his tent and made him talk to see if he was "rale Suffolk." When they found that he was, they were for taking him off for drinks: he had had difficulty in withstanding these amiable attentions inspired by country pride.

But if he kept from sight on the journey he had Chicknick's approval. Chicknick, indeed, had ordered his freaks that when passing through any town where they were to stop and exhibit, they were not to let themselves be seen. "Folks' business is to pay money if they want to see you. And don't you forget it." And so in the streets of Bury the fat woman veiled her impressive amplitudes and the living skeleton his exiguities: if the lion was allowed to roar, it was only from the unseen cage; and if, indeed, he was encouraged thus to announce his presence, it was only to quicken the interest of the listeners in a beast so ferocious that he frightened you even before you had paid sixpence to see him.

Now that central Suffolk was behind him, Daniel began

to be moved by the mere sight of the fields slowly passing before his veiled eye. For these were so near to and so like the fields where, till his exile had begun, all his life had been spent. He felt that if the people did not know that he was there behind the wall of that painted caravan, these fields knew and responded to him. And now they were not merely *his* fields : they were Mabel's—and let him not forget this : they were God's. For every form of natural beauty that moved him must, now that he had been given eyes to see, be recognised as part of the mantle of Jehovah. These fields must know what he knew : indeed he felt that they did, that they were a beautiful confession of God, so that, as he reflected a little wistfully, they must have known God long before he did. When, for instance, he had left Gippeswick for Liverpool (that day so many months ago, with his heart sick and even filled with a sort of anger against his mother who had let him go ; and when he had no sort of knowledge of Jesus, his Saviour), these fields had known ; these fields had, even to his unheeding eye, declared the glory of God.

But how forgiving they were, because He whom they interpreted, forgave. They did not reproach him, but rather they rejoiced with him : they exalted his life, they told him what, before, had begun to be a thought in his mind, that if he had left them he must recognise that he was now among folk, the dwarf and Bligh particularly, who needed to learn what they had always known, and what he knew now.

The giant was happy. With every jerk of those uneven wheels below this cart that was his eyrie, he drew nearer to the Suffolk capital. Presently he would be able to make a journey from Gippeswick. He could take the greater part of the day for himself and her. And there might be other days of delight to follow. For no longer would she insist that she could only go out with him when she could not be seen.

The show came upon the outskirts of Gippeswick about three of the afternoon. Daniel, looking out, discovered, as he had had reason to fear, that he was made the chief attraction and that, indeed, special bills had been printed over and

above those with which usually Chicknick announced his attractions.

CHICKNICK'S
WORLD'S BEST
including
DANIEL WINDMILL

Famous throughout Europe as the East Anglian Giant.
Come and see your own great man.
Do not be behind the rest of Europe in admiring this Stupendous Being. Born and bred in your own Suffolk and near to your own great City of Gippeswick. Daniel Windmill is now returning to his beloved county after enthralling the minds of millions of persons in other parts of the world.

Daniel shuddered, and for a moment all his old sense of horror revived, blotting out the later consolations. He forgot Heaven; he forgot Mabel. He saw himself a freak stared at by the boys who had made life a bleak misery in the past. For he was not coming here like the once-despised villager who, having gone away, returns in triumph, having by intelligence and industry made for himself a place of honour in the world. *His* form of notoriety was really only a confirmation of their earliest judgment. He was the chicken-stealer ultimately hanged for murder and burglary. There must be an "I-told-you-so" air in the judgment passed by those who had known him in his own village. "Here's Dan'l Windmill—always said he wore a big silly freak; and now he be big enough to be in a show and silly enough to go in it!"

He shuddered at a final thought. Suppose Mabel saw these bills. . . . But then he lifted his head proudly. Mabel was his now. She had taken him in spite of all. He could welcome even so severe a test as the fact of his public exhibition imposed on her. For in triumphantly passing that test she glorified her love.

He had wondered if he would see any faces that were familiar, but he hoped not; for he could not believe that anyone he could meet would be other than inimical. He wanted no boys, haunters of that village street he so well knew, to be here to greet him. For any greeting would be a derisive one. And he had written to his mother asking her not to come to Gippeswick. "For somehow I do not want to be seen by you in a show. I will come over to yours—and mine—in Doddery's bus." He had smiled, writing this, for Doddery's bus had a pleasant sound. Doddery had always treated him with a sort of respect. If he stared, he did so with approval: he believed that, as a native of Stowe peninsula, he had reason to be proud of a giant bred where he had himself been bred; he had a new respect for his own soil. Daniel knew that Doddery pointed him out; but that he did not point with a finger of derision.

Over the cobbles of Gippeswick town bumped the caravans, a squalid procession of smudgy yellows streaked with reds and blues, drawn by oddly assorted horses, and with buckets swinging from axles. From a window of one of these travelling homes, here and there, a rather tousled half-dressed show-hand would look stonily upon the latest of the towns before whose ingenuous citizens later, that same day, and for a week afterwards, he would strut in tinsel; or, more humbly stationed, help others to do so. To Daniel only did this capital town of Suffolk signify more than a minor background among the hundreds in which, in recent years, the World's Best had put itself at the disposal of folk hungry for wonders.

It was as smelly, sawdusty, flashy, noisy and totally ignoble a procession this, as ever crept without shame into a respectable and impressionable agricultural town. But Daniel was at no pains thus to characterise an affair which he saw only in terms of a means to an end. This procession bore him into Gippeswick and from Gippeswick it was possible for him to convey himself to Stowe. He planned to go next morning.

The marquees had already been set up by the advance

party. Chicknick, alive always to what was due to the World's Best, kept himself well stocked with canvas. By means of duplicate marquees he could always keep an advance detachment on the road who prepared the scene for that Best of All Refined and Instructive Entertainments.

These advance agents also made it their business to bill the town, and it was to their efforts that Daniel owed the experience of finding himself introduced to Gippeswick as Suffolk's own giant.

The procession, having made its way through a thronged and deeply impressed Cornhill (seventy years ago the gift of surprise had not been taken from us), lumbered on to the waste edge of the town. Already a great beflagged canvas hall announced the spot where the caravans should halt, and a few minutes later the driver who sat on the box drew in through a gateway, surrounded, as Daniel could see, by gaping boys alert to find a butt. He ducked his head and in another minute knew that, until the performance, he was free from the scrutiny of his fellows of Seely Suffolk.

CHAPTER XXII

NOT since he had first put it on did the squalid gaiety of his uniform so trouble Daniel. Who might not be sitting under that canvas roof waiting to see *him*—individualising him and giving him the character he had earned so long ago? He would like to have had an invisible place at the turnstile, checking the incomers, with power to turn back such as he could not welcome. But they were all gathered now, whoever they might happen to be. He could see the lights faintly shining here and there through the canvas walls: could hear the anticipatory murmur of that crowd of his own Suffolk.

The sight of a lighted marquee, viewed from outside as he viewed it before passing to his place of waiting, always strangely moved him. There they were, all those unseen people, perhaps five hundred souls, whose faces he could not see, but who were there, each a mysterious entity with impulses of love, and hate, and cupidity, and generosity. And in the darkness out here, with the evening star burning red over his head, he trembled for them. If only they were there, not merely to see him, but also to hear him! Or if only some flaming evangelist could have accompanied him to the platform and cried out to them to flee from the wrath to come, to hear the news of salvation! If only! . . . In this way were all his ideas mixed up. From being the trembling exhibit tortured by self-awareness, he could become the dumb and inefficient evangelist crying out for opportunity for another, if not for himself. The awful futility of this show appalled him: there were all those souls of men looking to see him when they should have been looking to see Jesus. Suppose that in passing among them through the turnstiles to-night there had been one who

paid not, not being seen; one usually depicted as having but a skull for head and a skeleton arm with which to touch? Suppose that even as these people sat gaping and listening to the turgid and inane rhetoric with which Chicknick nightly supplied his hearers, that non-paying entrant, that Deadhead, should touch one here and there. . . .

Death to come to one, without warning, as one sat so absurdly, so ignobly occupied! Daniel was overwhelmed. Often before had the thought made him tremble, but here in Suffolk his distress was intense. And then in the night, lonely though with some hundreds of his own Suffolk folk within twenty yards of him, he cried out for their salvation. And then he went in and took his place between the dwarf and "Fairy," the heaviest woman in the world, in readiness for his call.

When he passed the curtain, to be eyed as it seemed by all Suffolk, he received a noisy cheer. There was some laughter too, but the character of the welcome was mainly a kindly one, much louder than that which had greeted the dwarf, and obviously intended to show Suffolk's approval of a Suffolk man. But he daren't look into the dim vault below, crowded with pale faces in which burning eyes seemed, as eyes had a way of doing, to unite to make one eye that blazed its way through his soul.

He thought with deep dread of the ordeal that must follow, when he must take his place in the tent with the dwarf, and submit to be considered, pinched, and cross-examined by Suffolk folk, using the good Suffolk speech for that miserable purpose. Ordinarily it thrilled him to hear his own tongue with its drawling, open vowels; but the thing that had pleased him was to be used now to give him shame and pain.

Yet presently he consoled himself, when, slipping behind the curtain, he reflected that these people mattered nothing: Mabel alone in Suffolk mattered. And Mabel was securely his. To-morrow he would be with her. To-morrow his lovely girl with the warm, small hands and the voice like a river. . . . He thought of her interpreting herself to his heart in terms of all the beauty he had ever seen.

He entered his tent calm, sat down and waited. The dwarf as usual had gone off at the insistent bidding of a thirst, but was back as the crowds came roaming about the booths. Daniel kept close to the thought of Mabel. Her essence, being a sweet Suffolk essence, seemed to protect him against this Suffolk curiosity. . . .

And then the people came. They were Gippeswick folk mostly.

" I see the show when it come into the town this afternoon. I didn't see *you*, though," giggled a young wife who, holding her husband's arm to support herself in the adventure of addressing a live freak, made Daniel feel wistful. But to-morrow he would find a prettier arm than that hooked to his. " Where do be the place where you be born, young man? *Reely* in Suffolk? Oldborne? D'you know Mr. Bryce that live there? "

Daniel had a funny sick reminder. It was as if a voice had spoken from some far-away past. He was back on that dim stairhead listening first to the pert young clerk and then to the silencing of that impudent person by the noisy fury of the bully, his master. Know Mr. Bryce? Was it not the result of his being driven off by that man and his opposite neighbour that a tall young man learnt for the first time that he was a freak, fit for a show, and therefore potentially also an exhibit, to support his mother?

Daniel had been requested to stand up by the usual sceptic who haunted these shows—this time an old, square-bearded farmer who was sure there was a catch somewhere.

" But you don't take *me* in. Nawthen take me in. I've got a head orn me, and I have got my own way of finding you out, I have."

But he could not prove Daniel an invention, and he passed on muttering to the dwarf.

Daniel only discovered that he was being faced by an acquaintance when he looked back from following the dubious farmer with his eye.

" What," he cried in a sort of alarm, " that can't be Mr. Doddery? "

" Doddery it be," said the busman. " I were in from

Orford. They bid me come back and take in a party to-night. So I come. Well, now, who'd a-thought o' seein' you, Dan'l! And doin' very well I reckon? Not but," scrutinising him carefully in the light of the flare, "you don't look as if you was at home a-mealtime. You *do* look bad. Don't your master feed you proper then?"

"Oh, *I* be all right, Mr. Doddery!" Daniel assured him hurriedly. Here was an Oldborne–Stowe face! He wanted to ask questions, not to be asked them. But he did not know what to ask. He plunged.

"Oh yes. You been bringing folk in from Orford I reckon. Not from Oldborne?"

"No, nor from Stowe. I try my best to get some folk to come, but they ain't got no spunk. Them as I talked to wore with their heads stuffed that full with this here weddin'."

"This here weddin'?" exclaimed Daniel.

"Whoi, yes. But I dessay, now, you won't rec'lect. Tom Rossmore. That be he: Corporal he call himself now; a man from our parts; a big fellow won'erful worth looking at; in the artillery over at the Fort. Well, that be the man, sure enough."

"Yes," some echoing or chorusing voice within Daniel was crying, "that's the man! The one in the wood who had done black things, or covenanted to do them. . . ."

"And the gal—I don't suppose you'd know *her*, though she wore in Laughter's farm over at Oldborne once; 'cause I drove her there. So you might have seen her, Mabel——"

To Daniel the tent had become suddenly a very strange place. The flare had begun to shriek in his ear a sort of inane derision, and to burn down upon him like an angry sun, while Doddery's voice, or the thing that Doddery had said, seemed to break upon him like great, terrible, stunning waves upon an unresisting beach. He was in the midst of storms. His heart cried out. But his voice may have seemed collected enough to Doddery.

"Where do you say the weddin' 's goin' to be, Mr. Doddery?"

"Whoi, at the parish church at Stowe, you know. They say that's been decorated proper."

Daniel nodded. There were other people anxious to examine this Suffolk giant. Doddery passed on.

"Yes, sir," Daniel was admitting to the next visitor, "I wore born at Oldborne. And I do know Stowe won'erful well."

The thought that lay in his mind was that to-morrow he was to have seen Mabel at Stowe; and that still he must see her there.

CHAPTER XXIII

AS for what actually happened on that mirky morning, these sixty years ago, there is no better authority than Doddery—George Doddery, son to Doddery the busman, and who now "conveys" your luggage for you out of the big, roofed town-station in Stowe. He still likes to set forth that he was there.

"Whoi, man, well I moind all the talk about that there! I wore in the church, and not many there nayther. I wore close upon my fifteen, and my oldest brother—he have been gone these many year. He fell out of a trap and we bury him over in yonder corner. Dear! how time do whip away! Well, Rossmore's sister and my brother walking out at that time, I wore by way of being a relation. Though nawthen come o' that. Whoi! she and her young man had words, they had, and she got on the cross ticks, and he too, and they parted. And after all she went and married a man from London! And that's the last I heard o' her. But they was full o' Tom's affair that mornin'. Well I moind how misty the mornin' wore! Early autumn sea fog, fit to parish you, an' a rare dag on the ground. It wore what you might call a peculiar mornin'—suffen funny in the air. You wore ready for anythin'. She—I mean the bride—thought that. She complain of it, I'm told."

And very likely she did. The church was the old, beautiful, T-shaped church of the parish of Stowe. It is to be found still standing securely. For what are fifty years to a fabric with ten times that age to look back upon? It stands smothered in its ivy and in the midst of stones bearing names that are names still hereabouts, stones that serve by their hints to relate the human to the divine, as signified by the older stone of the church about which they cluster. Below,

taking its quiet shining way in and out of its green and wooded banks, lies the blue river, moving into the sea whose breakers fall upon the sandy bar visible at low water.

But on this autumn morning, sixty years ago, white mists rolled over the ground between church and river. It seemed as if Nature sought to give a proper environment for that legendary scene. For the thing could not have been as it was, had the day been clear and men's figures plain for all to see, and with folk drawn by sunshine to loiter about the lych-gates.

It was a cold, soaking mist, strangely cold, indeed, for so early in the autumn, and of the kind to keep folk walking quickly when not indoors. It was no bride's day; and certainly no morning to bring out such as were not of a bridal party. A few women from the village went along to the church, but were glad to get inside at once. If any waited outside by the lych-gate, Doddery does not remember it. "It wore one of them rale cold mists, that work through your clothes and get down your neck. I wore fair frawn. That would have had to have been a man's own weddin' to take him out. With a woman it be different. She like them things. But that day even the women didn't stand outside."

One can see the little group, pausing uncomfortably like a flock of silly Suffolk sheep, and gaping towards the door of the church that, in the mist, could only be seen dimly. And then one sheep boldly making for the door, the others would hurry in in a body, hoping that nobody would reprove their temerity. In the little, dim church, with its oaken rafters, they looked about them, anticipating the entertainment for which they had braved the cold, white mist. They dared not whisper, for vicars exercised a sharp authority in those times, and the reverend man might descend suddenly in cassock and other signs of his office. They huddled, their blue faces still damp with mist, and at last began to pull themselves straight and to look behind towards the door. For from outside came the shuffling of feet. These would be "the friends."

And now, up the aisle, came a little self-conscious group,

free for the day to mount a sort of domestic stage, to take a minor part in this recurring drama of life. Here was *their* occasion, when they were separated from and exalted above their neighbours even as their betters might be said to be always.

The garments which ordinarily they wore only on Sundays they wore to-day, with coloured ribbons added. Their faces shone with soap and with smiles and nervous excitement. They tittered, became suddenly aware of the solemnity of the occasion, looked uncomfortably grave, and then waited. Presently the squeak of new boots told all now gathered that something important was about to happen. A moment later, sharp stepping up the aisle, came the bridegroom. They say that Rossmore looked very sure of himself. "*Too* sure of himself" is the record of Doddery the younger. "When a man look so certain at a toime like that when it seem proper he should be thinking humbly, it don't mean any good, is what I say."

There were others, however, who seem to have approved of the manner which, they said, possessed a man who takes a man's responsibilities. On the heels of Tom Rossmore came George, his brother, as best man. And now there was a rumble of wheels. That could mean only one thing. Already the Vicar stood beside the altar to show that the occasion for which he was there was reaching its proper climax. And a moment later there befell the hush that heralds, and has always heralded, the coming of the heroine of the story; the woman to whom this affair is inevitably the beginning and the end. For the moment in which she is being led to the altar, those who watch may very well hold their breath as at the spin of the dice.

That girl was always a beauty, soft and white and rounded. She must have been something to take the heart of a man by storm, in the simple white finery that she had put upon herself. They say that she trembled on the arm of her father—which was a miracle in one such as Mabel Hathage, who in daily life was so smooth, and took everything so easily. But they say, too, that, seeing her man waiting at the altar, she grew red in neck and cheek, and that her eyes shone, and

that she seemed to put off her trembling and go forward with a shy eagerness. It was the man who was cool, turning with a little, assured, masterful smile.

The next moment the lean parson had stepped before his plainly furnished altar and the service had begun.

And it was then that the miracle, or the wonder, or the "bit of madness" happened. It was a "bit of madness" to Doddery, and so he has always characterised it since. The windows looking into the church were then, save those over the altar, of plain glass. Of such were the windows in the south transept.

Now Doddery the younger, being a friend of the parties, was sitting with his sister in the front row of the centre pews and so commanded a view of the south transept plain glass windows. On the outside these windows are higher than those looking into the nave, and must be six feet at least from the ground. The question of height has its importance. It certainly had its importance to young Doddery, sitting there with his curious eye upon the pair before the altar beginning to exchange their vows. He found himself filled with the idea that the girl was much more moved by all that was happening than the man; and it was then, suddenly, that the gaze of Doddery the younger, momentarily wandering, alighted on the high window by the south transept. What he saw there stopped his thoughts, filled him with a panic terror, a terror in which there was neither reason nor clear thought. He says that his only idea was that he must himself be going mad.

And what he saw, looking out of the drear mist, was a face, the face of a man; the pale face of a young man; the face of a young man in some sort of frightful distress; a distress that distorted the muscles so that the man looked like a madman.

In the next moment the face disappeared but showed again a second later in the next window.

But what overwhelmed the watcher in confusion was that the young man did not appear to move as if he worked up and down a ladder.

"He seem to jump from window to window and back

again as if he were on his feet. And yet I say to myself, he couldn't be on his feet with the window so high from the ground."

As soon as his mind gave him leave, Doddery nudged his sister and nodded his head towards the window. But she, womanlike, being absorbed with what was progressing at the altar, didn't look until it was too late to see more than something like a shadow disappearing into mist.

After that it was with difficulty that young Doddery controlled his bursting impatience for the service to end. Wedding guest or no wedding guest he knew where he was going when he got outside! And so, when the little group had taken their places on either side of the path, and the relations of the parties standing in front were making ready with the rice to catch the couple as they came from the vestry, young Doddery bolted round the church towards the south window. He remembers now how the cold mist smote his hair as he ran. When he got to the window he measured it with his eye.

Six foot six from the ground, not an inch less, he told himself, not an inch less. And nowhere was there sign of a ladder, a chair, or even a stone. But there *were* footprints. Under the window was a flower-bed turned over by a gardener perhaps a month before. Doddery stooped. Footmarks, certainly. But not the feet of any ordinary man. These were huge feet—"Onnateral I called them to myself, and I follow them roight out of the churchyard. I come upon them on the soft mud outside, and I could see that they led away down to the fields. And across the fields wore the way to the river. But then somebody fare to call me, and being of the weddin' party, as you might say, I had to go."

But the astonishments of the day were not over for the heroic Doddery the younger. He went on with his sister to the Hathages' cottage, and though a junior and inconsiderable member of the party, he got his greeting as he entered.

"Here be young Doddery that one of these days will be going through what the Corporal have been through

to-day!" Rossmore, sitting at table by his bride, looked and laughed loudly, and was understood to say that he was all right and could go through the same again without turning a hair, and of that he was sure.

Mabel pouted, then turned tender eyes upon him. It was plain who gave and who took.

"Well, but," says young Doddery, "I hope that when my time come I won't get a turn like what I wore given to-day sittin' in my liddle old parclose, and seeing them eyes staring in at me."

"Eyes? Staring in?" And all attention was turned upon the boy. "What eyes? And where?"

"In the church. A-starin' down out o' window in t' south soide. As for *what* eyes, how do *I* know? But they fared to be like madman's eyes—and he must have been a rare big man."

"Whoi do you say that?" The question came sharply, shrilly from the bride, whose face, at first confused, had lost its softness and grown pale and hard.

"Because he wore able to look in at the window without standin' on a ladder."

"If there *wore* a man, and I don't s'pose there wore a man, he might have had a ladder."

"Oh, but he hain't. He wore a rale big man. I know, 'cause I seen the marks of his feet. Great feet they were, like as if a giant——"

"I expec' you wore dreamin'," broke in the girl harshly. "I don't reckon there wore a man."

"Whatever it wore,"—it was Tom Rossmore, the self-possessed bridegroom, who spoke,—"whoever it wore, it woren't never a *man!* It wore a *thing!*" And he laughed loudly, and with a coarseness that Doddery remembers. And the bride, colouring, laughed too, shrilly, as if she understood the joke he made though nobody else did. They looked from one face to another until Mabel, that had been Hathage but was now Rossmore, flourishing her little hand with the ring on it, as if it was a talisman to drive away something that troubled her, called out laughing:

"I'll cut no cake for nobody if I'm to be bothered with

all the hobgoblins that young Doddery like to scare us with."

"It wore no hobgoblin," began young Dod, "it wore a man——"

"That I'll take my oath it woren't," cried Rossmore, laughing again. "But that do be enough o' that. Who's a-goin' to put up a health? For I'm that dry." And so they got to their junketing. It wasn't long before Rossmore's voice was the only one to be heard, for, as he would have said himself, "he liked what was goin'." But, as Doddery the younger has since testified, "he wore not one that could hold a lot without showing it. He wore singin' and chuckin' his mawther under the chin, and calling out for more till I thought she begin to be frit loike."

They had hired a couple of rooms out for the next three days before he went back to the Fort. It is not clear whether, on marriage, she went "on the strength"—whether, in fact, he got the permission of authority to marry at all.

BOOK II

CHAPTER XXIV

I

NIGHT hung over a world without life or form. It was a world that existed only in the conscious mind, if there was any such under the universal pall. In that mind alone could there be awareness of the illusion of Time. And yet, as one supposes, the mind waited. And at last, as it watched, a change was hinted, though it remained imperceptible. The first thought of dawn comes not with something seen, but something felt. It is only presently that the utter blackness of the night seems less positive: and when that thought has been received, the observant mind retraces its most recent experiences, and finds, for the first time, that it has known for the past half-hour that a change has been taking place.

And so light comes. A first shape emerges dimly from the general gloom, and then the whole world follows, to stand, still dim and pale, but authentic, the discovery of the morning: like the white Dead, newly risen.

And to a soul that is enclosed by spiritual night, the light, when it comes, comes imperceptibly, so that only afterwards does that soul know that it has been subconsciously aware for long of the change.

He was broken. Yes, he was a bird with a broken wing. He was lame; he was blind; he stumbled over a way that was enclosed by unending night. He could not think; he could not feel.

And yet he could feel, for he could feel hatred.

It was a legend of the camp now that Daniel's " number was up." He hovered about like a ghost, and even Bligh forbore to do more than scowl and spit. And presently Bligh, getting more than usually " full " one night, and " trying it on," as he himself put it, with Chicknick, got a very rapid dismissal. It is evidence of the state of Daniel's deadness of feeling that he now scarcely appreciated his deliverance from the persecution of that man.

The giant tried to trap real emotions; but trapped emotions are like caged birds. He would wander away from camp when they rested among the Derbyshire hills and lift his eye to the setting sun blazing its way down the sky. One night, particularly, the sun was a vast blood-red ball before a dim grey sky. A golden glory was spread about near to its margin, but the arch of the sky was just that dim grey. As the sun sank, glorious in its going, a few small fleecy clouds seemed to stand round about it. And then quickly it passed, leaving, as it seemed to the quaint fancy of Daniel, those few fleecy clouds standing about like the bereft mourners when the funeral is over and there is only the anti-climax of going away to be perpetrated.

But save that he had that fancy, even in contemplation of a sight once so much loved, he could not find in himself a living passion.

He was beaten. He was broken. It seemed to him that life no longer had a meaning; or if it had, that he was denied an interpretation of it. He looked aimlessly at his surroundings; he went dully to his hated, nightly task, and scarcely knew that he hated it. For now he only discharged hate in one direction.

Yes, he knew that he was forbidden to hate, that he must pray for his enemies, that——

He slunk away in despair, being not the first who, coming to that useful test, has failed.

II

A great shock brings with it its own anæsthetic. Daniel having reacted violently to the overwhelming fact that he

had lost Mabel, was aware of nothing else. He thought something was dead within him : there were, indeed, days when he could have prayed that the apparent should become the fact, and that death should take him. But he had taught himself that to desire death was against the law which he had now accepted for his self-government. He must live and endure; and in the meantime he must pray without ceasing, not for death but for a more abundant life. He must thrust the sword of life through his heart with his own hands; he must drink the torturing springs of vitality. He must live and not die. And he must no longer think of that woman.

He must accept from the beginning a precise prohibition in those terms. She was no longer, in any sense, his. She was out of his life for ever. And every view of a clear night-sky was a pain, because it brought back a memory of a triumphant walk homeward with the stars racing and leaping before him in their joy for his happiness. There, now, they hung : and their glassy immobility hurt him more than a blow. It was like meeting a friend who looked through one instead of mingling glances in friendship.

The sight of lighted windows, too, filled him with that same grievous reminder. He might have reproved in himself a sentimentalism if he had known what the word meant. Fortunately for him, as for other persons moved by direct emotions, he could not only not describe his feelings, but did not even know that a language had been created with which to characterise such things.

He knew but this, that even an alien world like that of London gave him constant reminders of the lost past, and that prayer was his resort.

Presently he found that the numbness had been a sign of something more than the mere fact which it itself signified. Numbness wore off, slowly; but this of his, as it quitted his senses, left behind a permanent condition of deadness. It was as if spiritual tissue had been destroyed. He would look before him into the night, catch a glimpse of a face, and find himself little moved.

It took him some weeks, or even months, to realise that

Mabel had killed something in him; something that had seemed one of the only two true things in his experience. And when he knew what had happened he still would not allow the idea to frame itself. He kept his eyes from the sight of the ruins of his love.

A man might well wrench a woman out of his heart knowing he could not have her; to do that was to do a duty: to do that was to be a man. But in his case, if anyone had done anything, it had been the girl; and it was not the girl's business. She had struck not only at Daniel, but at Daniel's love. She had killed not his hopes only, but the thing which alone made him value those hopes.

He was immeasurably shocked to discover his condition. He should have been saying to himself, "I do not think of her in that way because I may not." Whereas he was saying, "I do not think of her in that way because I cannot." And he went about sickened by an odour of mortality—the mortality of passion.

But though passion was dead, though he did not think of her "in that way," he yet thought of her all the time.

Yet not now of her separated from others: he thought of that man of hers—thought of him now with hate for himself and then with dread for her.

What he feared he could not define. He tried to reassure himself, telling himself that these fears were merely part of his character. Throughout the winter he got news at intervals from his mother. There was never a reference to Mabel; how could there be? He assumed his mother knew nothing. As for Rossmore, he had always understood him to be a member of the garrison of the Fort with his home in Gippeswick. Sooner or later, if what one had always heard of the military was true, Rossmore would have to go on foreign service. . . .

III

By now it was plain to everyone in the camp that Daniel was ill with a sickness that worked slowly below the surface—sometimes letting him carry a flush on the long, lantern-like

cheek by way of achieving a very fair parody of the colour of health, but that secretly never let him go.

He himself returned often to the idea of his own mortality, seeing, a little way on along the path, the shadow of death falling. He would gladly have hurried to meet it were he not each time reminded of the dreadful duty of life that was still required of him. For he knew, from little indications, that if he consented to live manfully a little longer, God would at last show him mercy.

Weeks, months were suffered to go by and he still could not face the memory of that dim morning, when, a long lunatic upon the road, he had gone lolloping through the mists to Stowe. But slowly the details began to assert themselves, and to form a picture. And there was more than the memory of Stowe : there was a visit to his mother to be remembered.

Now that so many months had passed since the reaching of the climax in his soul's history, Daniel Windmill, giant, on the staff of Chicknick's World's Best, that now made its way to winter quarters, would ask himself if he dare lift his head again and look at life. For long his senses had merely reacted to his memory of his experiences outside the church at Stowe on that morning of a sea mist.

When, all unreasoning, he had run away from the show ground and over the cold, white roads that he had known so well and loved, he had had it in his mind, he now could remember, that he must not only see but act. How did one stop a wedding ? he had asked himself ; and had been answered out of a book, for well had he learnt the service.

" Forbid the banns."

But the mists had deceived him : perhaps, too, he had walked with less than his old, not excessive vigour ; and there had been no casual cart to give him the lift he needed and had counted on. He had failed. But in some secret corner of his heart he told himself that he had failed for no reason that he had confessed.

He had failed because at the last he had been caught by a question. Was he there to serve Mabel, or to avenge

himself? He could still remember how he had stood in the mist, while still a hundred yards from the church, challenging himself.

If Mabel loved the soldier, must she be forbidden to marry him because *he* had once seen that soldier in odd company?

That challenge had been fatal to his resolution. He had moved on to his tragic rendezvous with Despair, and he had looked in at the window. He had said nothing, done nothing. He had watched her pass into the keeping of that man; and he had yielded less because of any moral authority exercised by the fact that between the pair was a bond of love, than because he was confused by his failure to discover his own motive.

And when it was over, when the red-coat was carrying her away, how was he to do anything but stumble back through the mist, back to a wood that he knew on the edge of Oldborne? There he could fall down beside an oak to whose shelter he could find his way in the night; there he could pray for her with whom once he had sought this very place. But there was one thing he felt he could not do—visit his mother that day. He would write her a letter. . . . But that was mere cowardice. He was bound to go to her and it would be no easier the following day. So at last, with the mist beginning to melt, as it does quickly on this coast, he lurched on through the village. To his relief it appeared deserted, but when he was about to quit the further end of the street a voice, unmistakably that of young Robert Lanes, called:

"It do be that freak—he have escaped—escaped from the show. Hi, Dan'l! Are it cold up there? Say, Dan'l——"

Daniel could hear steps of boys running and voices gathering.

As he had done before, so now, once more, he ran. He ran heavily, but they were clumsy-footed too, and he had the advantage of longer legs; so when he came to his mother's door they were already abandoning pursuit a quarter of a mile behind.

He stood panting hard while trying to lift the latch. Once

he put his hand to his heart, for he felt suddenly weak from the reaction of running.

The next moment he had raised the latch.

For the giant standing in that doorway, the appeal, implicit in the sight of so many of the familiar things of home, was blotted out by the shock of his experience at the church. Also he was overwhelmed by a taunting sense of the futility of his visit to Stowe.

He had failed. He had not served himself. He had not saved Mabel. . . .

The sight of that house where his mother lived was barely tolerable. For, after all, if she had not let him go he would have been a clerk employed in Stowe; and a gentleman, not a freak.

He stepped into the little, dim room; and his mother, at her sewing still, lifted her head. Then a faint flush burnt up under the yellow of her cheek.

"What? It's you?" For she had not expected him for a day or two. When he had last written he was not clear himself when the show would be at Gippeswick.

"Yes." He looked down at her, thinking, as he did so, of another woman. . . . They would have finished the wedding breakfast now. . . .

He did not, as once he might have done, seek in his mother's face for a sign of compunction. He did not demand dues as his heart could have demanded them a few months ago; he was intolerant, but only feebly, confusedly so: he pleaded no cause of his own: he was not judicial.

"Yes! that's me sure enow," he said. "I wore over and thought I'd better give you a look."

"You wore over?" she said.

He started. She knew nothing of Mabel, and now need never know. "Yes. And here I be." Which was his avoidance of the lie he was tempted to tell.

He knew that she studied him.

"Well now," beginning to put away her sewing, "you fare to be wantin' your tea, son." He had just enough leisure from the noise of the storm within his own soul to notice the metallic quality in the voice that addressed him.

Her voice had always been flat, but it seemed to him now to be more so, as if there was a decreased vitality in the personality making itself known to him from that remote, mysterious heart of his mother.

"You must want your tea," she repeated, because he had not seemed to hear. And only now did he turn once more from his visions of the wedding party in the house by the sea.

"Tea? No, mother. I don't want no tea. I must be goin' soon. You see the show 'll need me back. But I just wanted to see how you were a-gettin' on."

He was remembering the duty laid upon him always—nay, his responsibility. What, by the way, about his responsibility to the newly-married pair?

He had told Mabel in letters that he prayed for her ceaselessly. But he must now pray ceaselessly for Tom Rossmore, pray without ceasing. It was laid upon him—this duty. . . . But here was his mother with *her* needs. If his mind ran on the younger woman, if his appeal to the elder was half automatic, yet he must persist.

"Mother, if only I could feel that you were His."

"His?" she repeated, though perfectly comprehending.

"Jesus. Oh, if I could be satisfied that you were ready to meet Him."

"I think I be all right," she put in in a low, rather nettled tone. She had doubtless expected some such word from him, but now that she heard it she tried to check it.

"I hain't got nawthen agin you for taking up with—with that sort of religion. I dessay that air young man you wrote about show himself a good young man, but I hain't nawthen to reproach myself with, and I've gone to church reg'lar, and have my own old-fashioned ways and ideas, and I'm not one of your tittimatorters. There aren't nothin' wrong with parson that I know on. I'm sure *he* preach hard enough every Sunday——"

"I hain't sayin' anythin' agin him," proclaimed Daniel. "I'm sure he'd say what *I* say." Then he hesitated, remembering a stultifying talk of some years ago—the only one which he had ever held with an ordained representative

of the Establishment. "You could," he went on doubtfully, "ask him. He know about these things."

"Oh, well," agreed his mother, from a sudden eagerness declining to her normal air of weariness, "I can do that." She wanted to please him. "I can do that next time he come. And as he haven't been for long enough, that's high time for him to come."

"But, mother, I want you to think about these things and read your Bible, and reckon up what He have done for you. And while you are readin' and thinkin', if parson come and there are some things he can explain—why, he will. But tell him that I wanted you to know Jesus as your Saviour. Ask him to make plain to you what is really so simple. First your need and then how your need may be satisfied. I do hope he will be able," he finished doubtfully. He had the believer's natural mistrust of the conventionalist.

"Why, of course he do!" Mrs. Windmill's tone might have suggested a rebuke for such an implied doubt of the qualifications of a person professing to represent religion officially. Probably in her recondite mind was merely an ambition to conclude the argument and get on to other matters.

"How are you keepin'?" she demanded after the briefest pause, "for you know, Dan'l, you don't fare to be very grand."

"I'm all right." He shook, speaking the stubborn words. She drew nearer as she spoke, just as she had instinctively moved across the floor and away from him when he had begun to "talk religion."

"You bain't well. But it ain't only that. You look as if you'd had a shock or suffen."

"I be good tidily, mother," he said determinedly, biting his whitened lip. . . .

They would be on the road now, driving away, and him holding her little soft brown hand. He shuddered even while he stood there, his head dusting the ceiling, and looking down into his mother's eyes while using the lore of a son who has entered into manhood without ever remembering an occasion when he had been able to withstand her scrutiny. She did

not take hold of him, or use any impulsive gesture. But she watched rather than gazed, as if she might sooner or later hope to discover some sign that would answer her question better than his lips had done.

"I say you *ain't* good tidily. You bain't well. Do they feed you and look after you?"

"Oh yes," he said hurriedly. "Yes, yes. Good food. He get that angry if we don't eat. He allus a-talkin' to me about it."

"And are they kind to you?"

He flushed. It ought not to have been possible for a man tall as he to be asked if others were kind to him. It should rather have been a question of whether he was kind to others. But he answered her.

"Oh, I do be purely. Don't you fret yourself, mother."

"But," for her scrutiny was getting results, "you're thinner. You bain't the man that you were. See, son, you've got to give up that there show and come back."

If he paused to consider, it was for a moment only.

"No, mother, no. I couldn't earn nawthen worth while here. And if I bain't so hearty as I wore——"

"There, I knew you woren't!"

"I couldn't do nawthen as well as before. I'd not have the vittals I needed." He purposely emphasised his own requirements. "And there be other reasons. There be a man in the show require my prayers, mother. There be more'n one man."

She looked at him really very much troubled. We are often most disturbed when the character of our own motives are thrust upon our attention by a frank display of the motives of another. It was not merely that his expressive evangelicalism was a sort of challenge to her habits of a lifetime, nor that she had a parent's instinctive suspicion of a new fluency discovered on the lips of a once rather silent child; but she was forced to examine her own failure to press for his return. She surrendered him to the show, though she cared nothing for the show's salvation.

Something had decayed in her. And yet she drove herself to speech.

"You must give up the show: come back here. We could manage."

Again he seemed momentarily to hesitate, and she cast him one fearful glance dreading that he might surrender. Actually he could scarcely have known, such was his absorption, what she said.

"Manage? No, we couldn't, mother," he declared now with great firmness. "How could we? And, yes, I need vittals to keep alive. A doctor that Chicknick make me see, he say that."

She drew a deep breath, and hoped he would not recognise in it a breath of relief. She knew his determination sprung from his wish to serve her. But why should he not serve her? . . . She was tired; and life looked precarious, and had grown to look more so with every day of her lonelier existence; while she had lived without the stimulus to the adventure of living which is maintained by contact with a young mind. Life was precarious; and she had also a deep, instinctive dread of surrendering anything that brought in regular money. Her mind really exercised itself negatively. She did not know that she was a money-lover, but money mitigated the weariness; she was becoming so tired. "If you have to go back to get the money for the proper vittals——"

Her eyes in the yellow, pale face under the black hair looked dazed as if by the effort her mind had been making to evolve a policy.

"Yes. . . . it would be nice if you could do somethin', too, for them other men you're with."

Her voice was devoid of any suggestion of a personal participation in his evangelical fervour. It occurred to her that her own soul was shrinking, and had been shrinking since the day when she had let him go. She would presently weep at that failure of hers to attain a required moral serenity, which had led her into this surrender of her son to a life of humiliation. But she knew that she would not merely yield: she was not merely passive. There was something horribly active in her hunger for a continuation of her comparative ease.

She sat there, feeling little in soul as well as body.

But Daniel knew nothing of all this, and went away still in a maze.

IV

These were the memories that at last, and after the passage of so many months, pushed their way to the top again; in doing so, he supposed, when he reflected at all, that they signalised the fact that his mind was once more fluid and capable of bearing ideas upon its crest. Its hard-frozen surface, falling against which the very tears of his soul were themselves congealed, had begun to melt, to mingle with the stream that was the spirit of himself.

But he still, as he knew to his cost, sickened. He still, as he knew to his shame, hated. And, as he discovered presently he had, with a renewed awareness of life, an increasing sense of uneasiness. It was an uneasiness which passed quickly into alarm.

Twice of late a scene in his past life had presented itself to him vividly, and with an extraordinary and inexplicable insistence. He had found himself suddenly carried away from his surroundings of camp and caravan, and lying once more in the shelter of a bush in a Suffolk plantation. He could discover no reason why he should thus find himself, remembering so particularly his first sight of Tom Rossmore.

But he knew he hated. And he hated the more because he had been bereft, not only of his girl but of his passion. And yet he knew that his fear was for *her*. If his passion was dead, a new curious sense of his being required to protect her rose in him, strong and insistent.

In all these increasing perplexities he prayed; though now he prayed in terror for himself. For nightly he claimed forgiveness when he gave it not. All the promises of God were contingent ones, and he made to treat them as operative, whatever the state of his heart.

The distress of poor Daniel grew daily more bitter.

They were now on the road again, this time working the

Thames valley, a new country for Chicknick, who continued to assure the inhabitants of each town in advance that they were to see something that surpassed any wonder that they could ever have beheld. "Here is something that makes even your learning seem foolish," he had the profound satisfaction, by means of his advance agent, of telling Oxford.

For Daniel his shame in the nightly exhibition of himself revived with the restoration of his normal susceptibilities.

CHAPTER XXV

I

IT seemed to Daniel that, hateful as his work was, he had never hated it more than on the night of the entry into Oxford. In the course of his travels he had seen beauty in stone; but it had often been an isolated beauty. In Oxford he was dimly aware of a fact which a more sophisticated intelligence might have expressed by speaking of "a unity." The dignity, and splendour, and poetry of the place had, upon the giant, an overwhelming effect of reproof. He felt that the mere progress of that tawdry, yellow show, lurching through the High Street, was an outrage. A deep sense of oppression abode with him all evening. And yet he spoke not a word . . . who would have understood . . . who, indeed?

II

But the next morning his thoughts were to be sharply directed into a new channel. It was Chicknick's habit to buy a daily newspaper, and when he had read it to throw it into the tent, where, round their blackened trestle-table, the cherished "exhibits" took their dinner. It happened that Daniel was first in the tent that day; and finding the paper, he opened it. He was not much concerned with the events of the time. Freaks, he suspected, developed special interests and appetites, while losing others commonly felt; but his slow travelling eye, traversing page by page, paused suddenly. . . .

Daniel found himself staring in a profound confusion.

Having sat there for some minutes, the unhappy giant began looking about him, and the air that he wore might

well have been called one of suspicion. And indeed for Daniel that moment was mysterious and suspect. It seemed to have in it some dark alliance with preceding experiences that he could remember—particularly with a memory of waiting in a Suffolk plantation. One might reasonably imagine that that earlier moment, having had its hint from the later, had, so to speak, set itself to prepare the mind in which it made itself felt. Or was the appearance a shadow crossing the landscape of one's mind—a shadow of the thing already there?

He began suddenly to feel very much distressed. It struck him that he had not felt distress till now; that his first emotions had been wonder and an impulse to resolve what might almost be dignified by being called a question of philosophy.

Someone came in from behind him and saw him staring down at the newspaper. It was Bingle, the only person with intuitions in that whole party embracing the World's Best. The skeleton asked to have the paper, but made no comment on a fact that was clear to him. He sat as far from Daniel as possible, though knowing nothing except that the giant wanted to be left alone.

Presently other diners came in, some noisily; but, as Bingle could see when he took his head from his paper, the giant still sat looking determinedly at the cloth.

There must be a reason. Perhaps—now that he had turned his eye to a lower corner of the page—here *was* the reason. "Startling affray in Suffolk—Gamekeeper shot—Search for soldier." Come to think of it, Daniel Windmill was from Suffolk himself. Bingle gazed down the long trestle-table in a new surmise. There was only one name in the paper, the gamekeeper's. A relation perhaps; but it wasn't *his* concern so far as he could see.

He shook the idea from his mind and turned to the account of the wreck of the brig *Gallican Boy*. . . . Bingle had come of a family of sailors, grotesque as the fact might seem.

Daniel ate his dinner. He had learnt to do that whatever happened. He had done it even the day after he had lost Mabel; and to be able to eat one's dinner, when one had

no appetite even for life itself, is, we may suppose, to have attained some sort of philosophic security. Daniel had no idea of a supporting philosophy, and he did not need one with a rule of life that transcended mere philosophy. But *was* he without appetite to-day?

He was trying to make himself believe that he was stricken by this news, torn by sympathy for Mabel, and in a secondary degree for that man of hers. But he was staring down into his heart as if into a pit of foul passions, and shuddering at what he saw there. Sorrow? Sympathy? He rejoiced! he gloated! He had won. Yes, he had won—he, the despised and absurd, the giant, the freak. For what had been proved if not this: that, in turning her silly eye on a soldier, allowing the shallow waters of her mind to catch the colour of a red coat, she had been a fool? Was she not at that moment crying out to have her decision reversed? What would she not be ready to give to have been back with her over-long lover in the wood! (He had no illusions about her!)

She must know that only Daniel could have told her the language of love: he didn't love her now. Oh, let not that be thought. But Time's revenges were very pleasant things. So, so far from being without appetite, he ate with a savage gusto, as if, over his victuals, was poured the sweet sauce of revenge; mind being transmuted into matter! He had known this would happen, and had convinced himself that he suffered pangs of sympathy. But *fut!* He was happy, he had won; he had left it to Time; and Time really hadn't kept him waiting long.

But abruptly the onrush of these thoughts was held, and held so violently that he sprang back in his seat and made Bingle glance across at him with a new speculation. Daniel, however, would have said that it was no Bingle that he saw, but One who had suffered more than *he* had ever suffered, and whose first admonition was forgiveness.

Daniel rose: he was suddenly stifled. Great mists seemed to be rolling up out of the past into which he stared.

He must forgive: he must pray even with fury for Mabel, aye and for her man.

CHAPTER XXVI

IT did not strike Daniel as curious, because he had no habit of self-investigation, that though no name was mentioned except that of the gamekeeper, he had never a doubt as to the identity of the soldier. It seemed to him that the depth of his impressions of the scene in the wood could not have been for nothing. And there had been vivid recurrences of the vision. He went into the field adjoining the camp. It lay under him like a carpet, green and yielding. The spring air, light and gently warmed, played on his cheek, while in the near distance rose, their outlines softened to an appearance of fairy palaces, the halls and colleges of Oxford. A whole world of beauty seemed to lie about him, the builded beauty being of a kind slowly gathered, and that must have used time to adjust man's conception of beauty to itself.

An hour ago he had stood where he stood now and had responded almost passionately to what he saw. And now Oxford was shut out from his mind. At first he could see only a wood, could hear only the voices of two men; but presently he saw the face of a woman. For ultimately there lay the reality of the business for him. If Rossmore was found—and Daniel knew he must be found, just as he had subconsciously known that the affair was going to happen; and if the soldier was convicted, and Daniel did not doubt that he would be—then Mabel. . . .

The woman, the jilt, was proved a fool; the man, the thief of love, was in course of finding a rope about his neck. . . .

He stopped. He clasped his fingers. His heart besought forgiveness from his offended Master. How deeply offended. . . .

There followed now a sudden great pity for the girl. He

realised dimly, without putting the idea into words, her moral inadequacy for a test of this kind. There were some people who were not made for trouble. On the other hand, there were folk like himself who were intended to suffer, and taught how to bear.

But Mabel was not the kind to support a blow of this kind. He thought of her, small, rounded, glowing of eye and soft of skin, standing up miserably and ineffectually against this calamity. And he to be where he was! Yet how could he have served her even if he had been in Suffolk? He could not discover that he could have done anything. He must pray for her. Yes, he must go away to his caravan now. He must pray . . . pray. . . .

And he must pray for Mabel's man. He must be sorry for him. And . . . he wasn't sorry.

He had written to his mother asking her to post to him regularly the Gippeswick paper, for therein he hoped to find the details that a London print, such as he could buy on the road, would not contain. But for a week there was no news save that the murderer was still being sought for. . . . His mind showed him a picture of that finely set-up figure bereft of its red coat, bereft of much else, skulking in shadows. . . . He found an advertised description, learnt it by heart without knowing that he did. . . . Thomas Rossmore, aged 27, a soldier in H.M. service. Height 6 ft. Dark——

Where was the fugitive now? Was the girl giving him hiding? He considered them in a dreadful moment of detachment. Then, shudderingly, he turned his mind away—to Mabel.

For he dared not face the fact of his real attitude to the man who had robbed him of Mabel. Whenever, for a moment, he let his mind dwell on Rossmore, he remembered, not the soldier's present fears, but his old assumed ascendancy, his insufferable swagger, his unveiled contempt for the elongated rival found too absurd to be admitted to the character of rival at all. . . . Poisonous images, memories. . . . And nothing else. No pity.

But for the girl, pity enough. He must have developed

a new attitude to Mabel. He felt himself surging with an immense pity, in the exercise of which he was being lifted high above her until she no longer touched him emotionally at all.

He was not merely no longer physically moved by the thoughts of her and of her image that once had stirred in him passionate excitement, characterised by that strange tingling at the finger-tips, and sudden dryness of the mouth; but he began to suspect in himself a revulsion also from his old relation and attitude. He prayed for her until he became in some sort her priest. He had an overwhelming tenderness for her; and yet with it no renewed sexual impulse. He could not say that sex was dying in him, but that it was not there; it had disappeared. He was puzzled, and then distressed, as we are by any sudden loss.

He decided it was the result of a merciful intervention of God, who would not have him suffer long the crucifixion he had suffered on that misty morning when he had come to a church window and peered in.

He could allow himself to think of the girl, he could trust himself: because he was pitiful.

He dared not face the fact of his true attitude to that man. . . .

Hate, satisfaction of hate, triumph. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

I

IT was the last night of the show at Oxford. Because of his endless preoccupation with that late drama in Suffolk, Daniel was now very little troubled by consciousness of Chicknick's outrage on the home of Learning. He lived, indeed, for the delivery of the morning paper: and so far from wanting to leave Oxford, his only fear now was lest, in quitting the city, he would put himself further from the reach of news. It would be a fortnight before they arrived in Bristol.

It was a big, formless crowd that he looked down upon as he took his place as usual at Chicknick's call. In the mirk below he saw face next face, in long lines from left to right; and other lines running back into the mist beyond—the faces of men and women, each mysterious and moved by the passions of his kind, yet each with a like disguise, and each rebutting the gaze of any curious spiritual investigator.

Daniel never looked at these people: he was too acutely conscious of their looking at him. The nightly experience, spread over many months, had not in the least reconciled him to his business. He hated it, and was sickened by shame every time that he heard the hard metallic voice of Chicknick proclaiming what was to be expected by the eager crowd, when at last the Suffolk giant stepped upon the platform. But while, ordinarily, Daniel was too distressed and self-abased to look at those who looked at him, his new preoccupation had rendered him indifferent to his own feelings. He felt curiously aware of the irrelevancy of these people: there they were, hundreds of them—many of them probably young men from the University—young men of his own age,

with all a youth's ambitions and hopes, and yet with time to waste; even time to waste on staring, like uninstructed yokels, at a giant. And yet irrelevances all! He tried to think of them as souls to be saved, but to-night he could not really think of them at all. He looked down at them, scarcely knowing that they were there: knowing, indeed, only two people in the world—a girl and that fugitive of hers. Perhaps at that very moment, in the darkness and over the lonely Suffolk moorland between Gippeswick and Stowe, she was creeping out with food to sustain him in his hiding. How feeble a plotter she would be, how wanting in expedient: he was amazed at his own appreciation of her total inadequacy in a test of this kind.

He looked before him while Chicknick's dreary monologue continued, and then felt suddenly a strange tightening at his throat as if horrid icy fingers pinched him there. A hammer began beating noisily in his ear-drums.

He would have liked to scream: he was ready to believe that he had already done so. And yet he was still sitting there in his absurd red-and-gold livery, with his eyes upon a man in the third row who was gazing up at him. This young man had no moustache, while a certain other young man had had one. . . . But was he likely to continue to have when an obvious feature like that could be removed in a minute?

But why should he be here? Why come into a place like that? Why come among men? Daniel's confused brain tried to work it out, to find a solution to this enigma of criminality. Perhaps others have sought solutions before and since; and Daniel had never been deeply instructed in the habits of men.

But it did cross his mind now that perhaps the man below him was there of set purpose. Perhaps he was in Chicknick's show, looking at Chicknick's giant because he *wanted* Chicknick's giant.

A great shudder shook Daniel. He put out a hand, thinking he was going to faint. *That* man to be there. . . . And then suddenly he felt extraordinarily secure, and the faintness vanished. This was victory. A " heap " of memories,

as he would have called it, came in upon him—memories of little, acutely-felt humiliations . . . poisons set up in him by the alchemy of another's scorn. . . .

And he sat there safe and with his place in the comity of men, while another, an outlaw . . . . Complacency grew. . . .

For the first time in his experience, when the moment came he left the platform with a sort of swagger; and, still in the mood, he went to his booth to await the coming of the crowd. He knew that he would not have to wait long for the first caller to-night. The dwarf as usual had disappeared, and would not return until he was certain to be wanted. Daniel, not troubling to enter the tent, stood on the threshold under the noisy flare and waited. Overhead, obscured by the brightness of the camp lights, glinted the pale stars, blowing like cold white flowers in a deep, blue, and immense field.

He waited.

He knew that he waited and that he would not have to wait long. He had not thought out a policy; but he could be very cold and detached and in the merest degree triumphant.

And now he heard the sound of a sharp footstep. It struck him instantly that it was a trained footstep: the man might even betray himself by it. If Daniel had had a doubt, it must have vanished now. An instant later there was no doubt. The bad-fitting, gentlemanly black, that hid the straight, firm body, did not disguise from the present observer the fact that here was a soldier of H.M.'s army. The man looked into the tent quickly and anxiously, and Daniel saw, with a new shock, that the pallor he had ascribed to the circumstance that all looked pale in a crowd sitting in half darkness and facing platform flares, was a pallor that belonged to this man. Rossmore stood there, white and with cheeks pinched with anxiety. The lines were heavy about his eyes, which were the eyes of a hunted and terrified man.

"Whoi did you come here?" Daniel had asked the question before he realised how completely he had assumed everything. Moreover, he noticed in himself a certain

authority; and it must, he decided afterwards, have been now that the miracle happened. For he discovered at this moment, when in contact with this man with the face of terror, this outlaw running for his life, he himself was a changed man.

His complacency had dropped off him like an unclean robe; his detachment had vanished; and from cold assurance he was flung into a sense of shame and humiliation. "Do good to them that hate——" and he had been willing to triumph over such! "Give to them thy cloak also"; and he had been ready to pluck away the cloak upon the other, the cloak that protected him from men's enmity.

The soldier standing there and, in spite of his terror, considering Daniel with what was still an element of contempt, did not know how nearly he had come to facing an enemy who would have turned coldly from him even if he forbore to surrender him to justice. He hadn't answered Daniel's question simply because he was trying to think how best to deal with this big, silly fool, for the advantage of his own skin.

It was Daniel who spoke, using his same question, but using it in the spirit of that miraculous new motive: "What made you come here?"

"Because everythin' 's hibberdy-hobbedy. And when your life's in joparte you go where you can."

Even though his mind was occupied by the thought of immediate danger, Daniel experienced a sudden glow at hearing a word of Suffolk again.

"But this be moighty dangerous. Whoi did you come to Oxford at all?"

"Here, bor, don't ask me no questions. But as to comin' to Oxford I done what I reckon lots of others do."

He broke off; he did not say "other men with crimes to their charge." "I come away and I dodge through London. I thought o' goin' to Bristol and gettin' a ship. Then I get out here. Lost my nerve or suffen. Thought I'd do it by road. And then I see Chicknick's wore here. And I think of you. . . . I knew as how you wore sweet on her." He said these last words boldly; and the assumed claim upon

himself shocked Daniel. And besides . . . the claim was, surely, least upon himself of all men. . . .

"She say you'd got religion and didn't bear ill-will." (If she had known! But God knew. Daniel shuddered.)

"Dunno if it's trew. But——"

"Whoi did you lose your nerve?" interrupted the giant.

"'Cause the paper say they were watchin' all the stations. Somebody do be lookin' out for me at Bristol station."

"Well, but you can't stop here. *I* can't help you. *How* can I help you?"

For he could not see how he could do anything.

Daniel stood staring down at that driven fellow with his pale, frightened face and twitching face muscles. He did not scrutinise him with the detachment with which many observers could have done, with which he himself, during a hateful interlude, might have done—seeing with curiosity for the first time a human being suddenly separated from the whole of his kind, an outlaw, a Cain. He saw the man who had taken his happiness from him; though it was doubtful if he saw that man. For he was much more clear that what he saw was the enemy whom he must love. . . . Love demanded something; and did so in spite of a serious danger to the accomplice-after-the-fact! For even this elongated and indifferently educated young man knew that to "comfort" and aid a breaker of laws made you a breaker of laws yourself. You put yourself in "joparte." This truth Daniel knew, and one other thing he also knew; that the soldier must be got away.

"If you reach Bristol, can you find a boat?"

"Yes. I'm sartain sure of that!" He was trembling, in spite of his boldness to Daniel.

Daniel had begun to think hard.

"Then don't crickle now. Have you got a match? Then get out quick. Over hinder," pointing, "you'll find a row of wood hous'n. Go to the one at the end of the line and lay down under it. I can't come for an hour. But then I'll be with you."

Rossmore nodded and slipped into the night. Daniel stood staring at the darkness, and yet knowing what he had

done. He had comforted an outlaw; because this was the man who had despitefully used him.

He started. A footstep had died out and instantly he had heard another.

A moment later the dwarf entered. Spruce made no remark to Daniel, whom, since the departure of Bligh, he had chosen to ignore. He contented himself with eyeing his late caravan-sharer out of his dead-blue eyes, seeing, but entirely withholding comment. The dwarf had scarcely settled himself in his usual seat when a little group which had broken away from the main crowd in the big marquee came into the tent.

"I believe in seein' these freaks prop'ly," a high-pitched feminine voice announced, "and the thing to do is to get out before the crowd. Oh my! Here's the giant *and* the dwarf. Well, I never! Oh, George, *do* look at that big silly giant. Don't he look soft?"

"Ssh!" counselled a fat George, perhaps an Oxford butcher. "'E might 'ear you."

"Well, he couldn't do nothing, could he?" But the idea seemed to sober her, for she advanced with a tentative motion as if on the defensive.

This couple were followed by a party of young men from the University.

Daniel noticed that their speech was that of the Squire and parson at home. More than anything he hated being inspected by men of his own age. We are always most affected by those whose years approximate to our own: street children will observe and criticise other children of the same age in the street, and will be entirely indifferent to those who are only a year or two their senior.

Daniel, at another time, would have answered questions from these men coldly: moreover, he would have been acutely conscious that, coming from one of these old, noble colleges, trailing with them its traditions and dignity, they contrived to present the contrast between such as themselves, with their background, and himself with his.

But to-night he knew very little of what they said. And when at last they left him, he scarcely knew it. He was

thinking of a man, outside in the dark, who lay under a caravan.

II

Daniel, as he swung himself up the steps of his caravan, discovered Bingle there before him. Usually he went through those devotions which now, indeed, had their fixed place in his life. Bingle, he found, while unwilling to discuss religion, never interfered with him. Sometimes Daniel would throw out a word.

"If only I could make you see. A man that live day to day without a thought of his joparte is a sad thing to find, I do think."

"Don't worry about me, young man. My weight won't count in any boat."

Thus would Bingle try to evade his confession. But to-night the skeleton found his brother freak uninclined to speak.

"Yer ain't too chatty ter-night. And any'ow, yer ought to embrace every opportunity to talk to me. And I'll tell yer for why. Any minute a big wind might blow me off the earth altogether. When we go near the sea the boss's always yapping about taking care to hold on. 'E thinks I take things too lightly, and I says, what else d'you expect? If ye don't want me to do that yer'd better weight my pockets with metal, gold for choice."

His little, quiet, rippling laugh followed and died out. For it seemed to him that Daniel was in some area of thought outside his own ken.

And indeed Daniel was thinking one thing only: that out there in the darkness, under the very spot where they sat in the security and protection of the law, lay one outside law and hunted to the death.

"There be a man . . ." Daniel stopped, and turning looked into the night where it showed framed in the tiny glass window in the middle of the shut door.

"A man?" Ordinarily quick enough, the mind of Bingle caught an idea of mystery and darkness and no more.

"There be a man . . ."—Daniel's voice had grown faint and tragic, though he knew this only when he had paused after speaking—"under us."

"What? Under us?" With a half-comic grimace, Bingle had swung up to his feet as if the appeal was to action. "I'd better see—— No."

"No. It's thusn, Bingle. There be a man. Under there lying in the dag. He's got to git to Bristol with nobody knowin' nawthen about it. He be a man I know. I was a-thinkin' . . . behind that air box . . . and you'd not speak. . . ."

"I? No. Nor yet ask questions."

Bingle felt that that was rather happy.

"Then," said Daniel rising. "I'll be a-goin'. . . . We got that air key, hain't we? Because we could use it in the daytime."

"Yes. It's there." He pushed his head back and up sharply to where a key hung from a nail.

"Never been used. But *can* be."

That was another effort of pure thinking with which he was not displeased.

"Then," said Daniel, moving to the door, "I'll go and fetch him. But mind this"—for now, remembering his own danger, he bethought him to exclude Bingle from risk—"*you* hain't nawthen to do with this."

CHAPTER XXVIII

I

DANIEL sat on the dickey of his caravan, staring before him. . . . He was thinking of the time when the key could be put back on the nail. They were in procession, with Bristol to be made before night. But it was not of the show that Daniel thought. . . . He had managed to buy some tinned food . . . for a fugitive must be fed. . . . And soon the key could be put back on the nail.

But his eye went often to the van in front—the dwarf's van. . . . Yet why need he fear? To suppose that Spruce or any other member of the company guessed.

Presently he looked up with a new idea. When, before, in the procession, had Spruce's "home" immediately led his?

But when he looked he saw in front merely a lurching van, yellow with stripes of red save where these painted glories had been removed by time or collisions with other vans: a mere tawdry unit in a line of garishly decorated vehicles. Yes, he saw a lurching van with a little window that was curtained. It was easy to be mistaken in the idea that, once, the muslin was drawn slightly aside so that an eye might enjoy a view that included the van that followed—the van the key of which waited to be returned to its nail.

II

At midday the procession drew up, that horses and men might be fed. Daniel, making sure of the key, went along to where Blowser, the cook, was serving out bread, meat, and tea. He drew his ration, and then looking round, he started

at sight of Spruce. The dwarf's eyes gazed into him rather than at him; and they had a look as if they carried a message of universal death. Not a sign did he make. He took his food and carried it away. But this morning the minute figure possessed for Daniel a compelling fascination. If he had had the leisure for such a thought he might have decided that he was growing into the yokel who paid his sixpence to stare at freaks. For really he could not take his eye away from that diminutive and sinister retreating figure. He was so absorbed that when the dwarf was hidden by the line of the vans, he followed, still watching. And he was in time to see that Spruce, passing the only caravan that in the least mattered to Daniel, found it of such small interest that he did not lift an eye to it but continued on his way towards the country. The show folk would do this sometimes, walking on to a roadside inn and there waiting till overtaken and picked up by the vans. If the dwarf chose to take a little exercise, was not that entirely proper? . . .

It was a pleasant morning with the hedgerows tender with new green shoots. You could hear a lark above the sloping meadow, and a blackbird whistled loudly. And far buried in that dim blue haze a cuckoo made his call. The fact had not struck Daniel before, but here was such a morning as he, being at home, would have made his own.

To-day he had been made aware of these things only by some subconscious process. There was but one idea in his mental foreground.

But if the dwarf might enjoy these sights and sounds, might not his contrast enjoy them also? Daniel had no deliberate intention of following, and was a hundred yards in front of the spot where the vans stood before he realised what he was doing. He halted, instantly, and knew that he did so lest Spruce should look back.

He could see now that the dwarf approached a bend in the road and that, as he did so, he was met by a man plainly of the labouring order. Nothing in that, thought Daniel. But he judged from the attitude of the man that he stared at the dwarf and that then, as if to turn tables, Spruce asked a question. For now the labourer pointed up the road with

a waving forefinger and seemed to be reiterating some simple statement of fact in the manner of his kind.

Daniel thought hard: he passed a big bony hand to his forehead as if by that simple manœuvre to aid his intelligence to do what he did not know it had ever been called on to do before. As for the labourer, having just sustained an assault upon his senses by the spectacle of one human wonder, he must now endure another. The dwarf had disappeared round the corner and the man resumed his walk. But he had no sooner been met in the way by the smallest man he had ever seen than he must encounter the largest.

"Hi, bor," began Daniel. "What did that there ask you?"

The labourer stared in confusion and yet with delight.

"'E ask me where's post office."

"That wore all?"

"Yes, 'e did: 'e ask me where's post office." The labourer's eye roved over Daniel in wonder and the kind of alarm that is nearly all gratification. He was thinking what a thrill he was preparing for all thereabouts whom he would meet both on his way home and in days to come. He would have liked to keep this giant standing in front of him. And Daniel seemed to be turning away. Yet still this man stood, his gaze going up and down.

"Eight foot maybe?" he said at last, betraying the only idea in his mind.

Daniel had forgotten himself in the character of freak. He was asking himself what it was one could do at a post office.

"Or p'r'aps," persisted the man, who was seeing freaks without paying a sixpence as well as conversing with public characters, "or p'r'aps seven and a half."

"Seven seven," said Daniel, using the mechanical utterance of the show tent.

"And the little fellow now—'ow much would 'e be off the ground?"

"Three eleven." You could buy stamps or you could post letters. And lately there was the electric telegraph. They said you could send a message by that means quicker

than the quickest letter. While the rustic still stood gaping before him, Daniel turned to walk back. The caravans were beginning to move. He could see Chicknick's van, gold and blue, " the palace," as they called it in the show. And this gold-and-blue house, drawn by the only matched pair, was now approaching. When the third van came up to him he would swing himself aboard.

Daniel felt very sick. He had been walking irresolutely, while sometimes turning to cast a glance over his shoulder, what time the labourer, seeing that this wonder-animal would be going his way, kept pace.

" You be part of a show, you be ! " He had come to this brilliant conclusion by very considerable mental effort ; and he smiled with the satisfaction which naturally accompanies conquest after intellectual struggle.

Daniel did not answer : he did not know that he was addressed. If you could send messages quicker than the quickest travelling letter, you might get a message through so fast that the person receiving it could act on it within an hour or two.

Four hours at most might elapse before they came.

Daniel shook off the labourer, who had halted to watch the show come up and pass. There might be some more of they freaks. It was something to go home and say he had seen a whole show for nothing, heard the lions roar, seen the boss in his golden house-on-wheels, and talked to giant and little feller.

Daniel swung himself up beside Bingle.

" Been 'evin' a walk, Little 'Un ? "

" Yes," acknowledged Daniel without hearing any more.

There was the question of which door it would have to be. The front one was bolted and had many things piled against it. It was never used. And he had never contemplated that it would have to be open. But if one used the back door one would be noticed by the driver of the following van. Had not he a suspicion that a curtained window had been pulled aside ? The idea came to him suddenly.

" Pull out," he said to Bingle, " or I'll take the roan by the ole dutfin if you like."

"What say?" For there was no obvious reason. Yet Bingle, looking at his companion, grew slowly apprehensive of an idea. He had never before plotted, but he knew this much at least, that he was involved in a plot now.

"Pull out!" Daniel repeated. "I'll tell you in a minute." They were at the bend, and by pulling out now and letting the rest of the show pass them by they would be invisible to the other caravans. It was a rule of Chicknick's that the procession was never to be halted if harness gave way or there was other similar trouble.

Bingle thrust an arm out beyond the van and then drew his pair out.

"I'll be up again in a mo," he called as the following van passed him.

In another moment the tail of the procession had disappeared round the corner. Only a little subsiding dust and the grumble of wheels remained in Daniel's consciousness to tell him that his van was now alone. He stood up on the driver's seat and looked about. How much at happy leisure seemed that green and brown landscape under its quiet blue sky! The perfect idleness of the scene, like that of some inspired canvas, touched him; and yet somewhere there, in the cover of the shadowless hedgerows dividing field from field, a man must run for his life, waking that sleeping spirit of peace with horrid thoughts of violence. Those young, green hedges must do what they could to stand between the eyes of the law and the poor fugitive.

Already it seemed to Daniel a hideously unequal contest. . . . He climbed down quickly from the dickey. And now he must use that key—that symbol, as it had become, of all his most secret thoughts. He nodded to Bingle.

"As soon as I done it—you be goin'."

Bingle nodded.

Daniel hurried to the back, while Bingle sat there listening and waiting for the signal. Little 'Un, he decided, was away longer than he'd expected. But at last he heard a murmur, and then a sound of feet as of Daniel coming back.

Daniel it was, coming back to the dickey and lifting himself thereon. Already Bingle had set his team in motion.

" Quicker, if you can," Daniel said. Bingle struck the roan feebly, and as she broke into a heavy trot she dragged that comfortable beast, the fat pony, into the swifter movement, greatly to the disturbance of the good creature.

Bingle took his orders to-day and asked no questions. There were no particular questions that he would ask.

He was rather agreeably titillated by the thought that in these days of Daniel's regeneracy, when the giant met and obeyed so many prohibitions—obeyed them indeed with enthusiasm—they two should be engaged in the ancient pastime of doin' the cops.

" Hurry if you can," Daniel urged. " Get you back where you were. Somethin's in joparte."

Bingle understood. In dust that half hid their wheels and with a noise that was a unity of rattling crockery, colliding buckets, loose-jointed boards and ill-oiled wheels, the " Little 'Un's " caravan bumped over the rough uneven road. In another moment it was up with the tail of the procession. But it did not stop there, charging on until it came to its old place in the rear of the dwarf's van. A deft tug at the left rein brought the fat pony into the main stream of the traffic, while the following van fell back. Bingle succeeded in fitting his vehicle into its old place.

Daniel drew a long breath. If the dwarf had not come back there would be nothing new for him to notice. It was probable that the driver of his " house " did not know that a rear van had fallen out.

Daniel waited. He would know soon. They were coming into a village. He could see a church with pointed spire and a bunch of brown and blue roofs.

But they were not to wait until the village was reached. What might have seemed, to a distant observer, the figure of some rapscallion of a boy looking for a free ride, darted from the roadway and swung itself upon the step covered by Daniel's eye. Daniel remembered that he himself had once mistaken this figure for a boy's.

The giant drew his second breath of relief. There would be now nothing to notice. He looked at Bingle.

He was not clear how much Bingle understood of all this. It did not, however, matter. All was safe so far.

Once he noticed a slight trembling of that foul bit of muslin.

Good! Suspicion then, still fastened on his, the giant's van. Good!

Jolting through the village they came to the top of a small hill from the crown of which one got an open view. Brown and green spread that pleasant prospect of quiet fields and spring hedgerows. A bird, too far away for Daniel to know it, beat its wings luxuriously above the grass. Far away, over plough, a dog scampered, having broken from the black, thatched farm-steading near by. The animal's freedom and happiness stabbed its far-away observer to the heart. He eyed that happy landscape and thought of the trouble that ran secretly through it, giving the shadowless hedgerows the darkness of woe. And lifting his eyes to the horizon he looked on the outline of the city, away in the faint haze, its steeples and towers lifting into the dim blue. And to the southward he saw its river, whose journey to the sea was at that point pretty well completed. He could discover, too, great three-masters, indeed there was something that looked like a five-master, with spars black and sails reefed.

His gaze came into the nearer distance again. How utterly quiet it lay, only the playful cur providing a movement in the scene.

And yet he knew it for a scene hideously troubled, a scene that kept a dreadful secret, and the spirit of which attempted to carry a responsibility greater than it could bear.

Alternately he saw those fields as suddenly turning against all outlaws, offering to betray, until he could see only one lonely man running, dodging the hedgerows that would step in his way, and evading the field of plough that would call out "This man is no man of mine, but a stranger and an outlaw." To Daniel's affrighted gaze there was in process a contest that grew momentarily more terribly uneven. It was as if all nature had joined the law.

He glanced at Bingle. But Bingle seemed to give all his attention to his animals. He pulled on them with his feeble strength as they began to descend the hill. It occurred to Daniel that even if he continued to take the direct blame to himself, Bingle was joined with himself in defiance of the law. Did Bingle realise this, and, if so, how did his companion, as a Christian man, see himself and his new relation to the law?

The question had before flittered across the giant's mind, but he would not examine it. He would not examine it now. They had done what any man would have done. Jesus had been sorry for captives. Jesus would not condemn what a poor ignorant follower of His Blessed Self had done in obedience to what seemed the counsel of mercy. Mercy and not sacrifice—why was it not a rule laid down for them? Could they do less than answer an appeal?

Daniel looked again across the fair and quiet scene, following it to where the high spars of the far-away ships mingled with the sky. But no longer could he find it other than a scene that used beauty to disguise cruelty. Justice! This was not justice, if a country-side joined to help a thousand men to hunt one poor flying soul. If——

His thoughts were suddenly directed into a new channel.

There upon the roadside were three men. They were not in uniform, but Daniel knew from their shape and manner what they were, just as he knew from the beginning why they stood waiting.

The caravan had stopped: it remained there framed in the silent, living beauty of the earth from which God had raised all men, even Cain. One of these ill-omened persons stood parleying with Chicknick, who seemed to be getting angry.

"What 'll you be stopping and telling me next? Stopping my show!" His voice seemed to tremble with consciousness of the almost bestial enormity of the outrage. "Yes, you've stopped my show! Next time it will be the moon, or the universe. It's always the big things that little fellers like you must go putting your hands on! Stop-

ping my show! You ought to have something better to do. Three of you and nothing else better'n that!"

Respect for the representatives of the law was perhaps a little less servile seventy years ago than it is to-day.

"Well, we've our duty to do anyhow," said a dark man with hands that seemed so enormous that nothing could ever escape them. "And we mean to do it. And no talk from you, nor the Czar of all the Rooshians, nor yet anyone else neither, will stop us."

Chicknick looked at them with profound dislike out of his hard, black eyes, and spat upon the ground at his feet.

"Then fire away. Only look sharp. I've got to be in Bristol."

The detective-sergeant plunged a hand into his pocket.

"The telegram says 'in the giant's van.'"

"Here! Who sent that telegram?" demanded the showman.

"No name to be mentioned," said the policeman. "Confidential. Which is the giant's van?"

Daniel drew a deep breath. There would now be something to face. Chicknick came along with ill-concealed impatience.

"What's the meaning of all this play-acting?" he demanded.

Daniel, who had got down into the road, quivered, but looked into his employer's face. "I got nawthen to say," he answered.

"*Is* there a chap in your van?"

"No."

"There is—we've the best of reasons for believing there is."

"Then," said Daniel, for the first time feeling his feet, "if you're so sartain sure you'd better look. Here be the key." He gave the key to the sergeant, but at the same time he turned, his gaze fastened on the window of the van in front. And he saw all he wanted. There was no doubt now that from behind that dirty muslin there watched an eye.

The sergeant went boldly to the rear of the "giant's

van," thrust in the key and opened the door. Then he gave back.

" Nothing. Nobody," he cried in profound disgust.

Chicknick eyed him with amused contempt.

" Any more wild geese gone astray ? " he asked.

The sergeant eyed him surlily. " Oh yes. You think yourself very smart, Mr. Showman, don't you ? You just be a bit careful. I've got my eye on this show. I want to see inside of every hole and corner."

Chicknick waved his hands. " Very well. Nobody's stopping you. Have a look round. We usually charge people for what they see, but we'll not charge you a penny to-day. Only when you're searching the lion's den just you be a bit careful."

The policemen snorted and then began a search. They looked first into " the Crystal Palace," Chicknick standing in the road behind them and regarding them sardonically.

" You didn't look in that bottle," he said as they withdrew. " Now that's very careless of you. There's all kinds of wickedness in a bottle."

" Not so much about it," said the sergeant angrily. " It'll not take much for us to see something very suspicious in your talk, Mister. So don't forget that."

" I'm not like to forget it. This is funny, this is. But I'd like to know to whom I'm indebted for this bit of silliness, I would."

" You'll not get to know."

Chicknick waved a hand. " Go through the show then, and come back and tell me it's full of felons—thieves with their pockets bulging and murderers and all such. I don't know yet who's your gentleman that you've got your rod in pickle for. But be sure to introduce me if you meet him. He might join my show when you've finished with him."

He waved away the furious policeman.

The trio went on, peering in one caravan after another, and Daniel contrived to follow. He wanted to watch the visiting of one particular van ; and when they reached the dwarf's vehicle he drew near. A brief talk seemed to take place. But he heard nothing.

He retreated to a place beside his own carriage. The policeman came down suddenly from the dwarf's van, gave only a casual glance into the other vehicles, and then came back to Daniel.

" I've reason to suspect you know something."

" Oh, have you, sir ? "

" Yes." The sergeant was a little mollified by the " sir " —the first he had had since attacking the show. " Yes, we have, young man. Now I don't want to be hard on you. If you've anything to own up, and you do it smart now, and we cop him, I'd put in a word for you if anything was said."

" I have nawthen to say to you sir, nowt."

" Very well. I've warned you."

He turned sharply and went to the head of the procession, spoke a word to Chicknick and then, followed by his two men, hurried forward and, climbing into the dog-cart, set off rapidly for Bristol.

And Daniel, watching the trap round the corner, prayed again for a man who ran with all the world in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIX

I

FROM the moment in which he had first discovered that, not the police alone, but the whole universe, was bent on having that man, Daniel had known that his little trick to save was going to fail. Nobody could save in this world but Christ, and He could save to the uttermost.

It seemed that sin must be atoned for, and if the sin was against the universe, the universe must exact a penalty.

He was astonished as by a revelation. He had never considered the implications of moral law. If a man had blood on his hands and you could save him, you saved him—and you asked God to save him. You prayed "for Jesus' sake." But the mistake you made was to expect God to assume your interpretation of salvation. Christ could save to the uttermost. But to save from the captivity of men, and from the penalty exacted by men, was a thing that Christ must not be asked to do.

Daniel began to consider the matter from another point of view—the strictly personal.

He had done his best and he had failed. There had never been a chance for Rossmore, he supposed. But certainly he could not accuse himself of neglect. For Mabel's sake he had done all he could.

He noticed that he felt complacent; he had done everything he could for Mabel in this matter. Seeing himself complacent he began to accuse himself. He had troubled himself very little really about the fugitive. He saw in Rossmore his late rival; the man without whom Daniel would have known earthly as well as heavenly happiness; the contriver of the worst of his humiliations. It was Rossmore who had made Mabel laugh at giants! But he

had done his very best for Rossmore. He had done all that he could do for Mabel.

Suddenly he flung away these filthy self-conceits and abased himself before his Christ. What did he owe to Rossmore less than to pray for him, for his deliverance from sin, for his salvation before a day that Daniel knew must come very soon, the evidence being conclusive? And Mabel, poor Mabel! His heart, that had tried to feed itself with a banquet of pride composed of the thought that he had sought to serve her, must now throw up that poison. . . .

Events followed quickly enough. His mother, who did not write many letters, was apparently stirred up about "that there young man that they say lived here-about and that were one of the military. He's for the Gippeswick Assize. I'll send you the paper with it in."

He did not want the paper with it in. But he dared not write and forbid her to send it. The show had been working its way up the Wye valley after a fortnight at Bristol and a week at Gloucester. Daniel had got his mother's letter at Hereford, and the "paper with it in" reached him in the ancient city of Shrewsbury. He saw the sheet lying there where Blowser, of the fat nose and pimpled, who drew and distributed the mail, had thrown it in upon him.

He knew that it was the paper with it in; and he knew what he would read there.

II

Daniel read no more papers. He feared lest, opening one some morning, the tale of that bestial carnival of Death at Gippeswick would lie immediately beneath his eye. . . . "The crowd began to assemble as early as four a.m. . . . The scaffold, which had been set up the night before . . . Calcraft. The condemned man walked with firmness. . . ."

His young, morbid mind had sometimes fed on such filthy details when a paper had come into the house at Oldborne. There was Dr. Palmer for instance. . . .

No, he could not risk having to read now. He prayed: he prayed as he had never done.

He was bound to pray like that, to wrestle. On the night following the receipt of the paper containing the news of the trial, Daniel sat up with Bingle in their little, dim cabin with the flickering tallow between them. But when Bingle had retired, Daniel still sat up, an elongated shadow.

"Yes, you must pray without ceasing for him," Daniel commanded himself. "You must wrestle. Like Jacob at Peniel." He got out his Bible and began to read the superb story of that mysterious encounter.

"That man," he told himself, "was God. Yes, God. He wrestled with him right through the night. That's what I must do. . . ." He paused and began to murmur, his eye lifted now from the Book, for the words were words that he well knew. "'I will not let Thee go—I will not let Thee go until Thou bless me.' That be what we've got to do. We've to wrestle. It don't seem right at first soight that we've got, so to speak, to foight Him. But I do see that it's quite all right. And so there it be. We've not to let go till He bless us. . . ." And the form of blessing must be that God should take Mabel's man to Himself, take him straight from the scaffold.

Certainly the affair presented itself to Daniel in terms of all kinds of obscure implications. He was troubled because he could not feel free. He told himself that in his prayers there was an element of the forced. He was constrained. He was being moved, not by a natural love or pity for the man's wickedness, but by an abject consciousness of a former vileness in himself. He prayed to atone for the evil, gloating sense of triumph which he had admitted to his heart when first he had known that his rival and supplanter had gone down. Daniel prayed. But he now prayed without the torment of the question: did God accept his prayers, or did He recognise in them the mere effort of an evil heart to atone for one of its more desperate wickednesses? Suppose that, because of the black wickedness of his heart in yielding, for that hour, to hatred of the man and filthy satisfaction in his fall—suppose that God refused to recognise his pleas?

It might even be that his prayers, so far from helping, were injuring the man! Yet he went on praying; and

watched warily for all the devices of the devil, who would break into his prayers with doubt and fear.

They had turned from Shrewsbury into North Wales. Such a country Daniel had never before seen. He was immensely moved by the great hills to which his eye lifted in the green vale of Llangollen. But now they were in Llandudno, and it being July, Chicknick was doing good business at these seaside towns.

Daniel waited for the news that yet he would not allow himself to see. Three weeks was what they allowed in cases of that kind—three weeks and four Sundays.

On the evening of the last of these Sundays Daniel found his way to a chapel. It was possible for him to do this as the show did not travel on Sundays. Chicknick used to say—had said it to a reporter for publication: "I'm not what you'd call a church-goer. I'm going there when I'm a bridegroom—which won't *ever* be; and I'm going there when I'm a corpse. And not before. But Chicknick's World's Best is for the respectable British public that's offended by the sight of my procession of wonders stalking through their villages when the church bells are calling. So as we never do more than ten miles in the day, Monday morning early is good enough for me. And *nobody* offended. And what's more, I let my people go to church. I make a point of it. And see here! I've got a giant. And I'm ready to back him for fifty quid for a good Christian against any freak in any show now exhibiting in Great Britain." Indeed, there were moments in which Chicknick considered whether he should not introduce a new turn consisting of "The Christian Giant—tallest protégé of the celebrated C. H. Spurgeon, about whom he will converse free of all charge." But he desisted. You never knew. You might get among that lot of Jews in Whitechapel, or one might barge into a bunch of infidels, such as he was told were in Manchester. So no risks.

But in the meantime Daniel had his Sundays free.

Usually, if he could find a place in shadow, he went into a church or a chapel. He found that he preferred the simpler form of service observed at the latter; but the chapels made

one conspicuous, and the church service reminded him of home and the old times. And in Wales the chapel service was in Welsh.

On this Sunday, hearing of a little grey stone church far over on the Orme, he determined to visit it. But for some reason he said nothing to Bingle. Sometimes Bingle had accompanied him to church, doing so with his odd whimsical smile. But the appearance of the two freaks in a pew together made them doubly conspicuous; so that more often than not Daniel went alone.

Bingle professed amusement at the stares of a gaping congregation; but for Daniel the experience was confessedly a torture that grew no more endurable as time passed. Bingle . . . he assumed Bingle was less sensitive. And Bingle, as he supposed, not understanding, he often tried to slip off alone, though troubling himself much afterwards with the thought that perhaps, without his company, Bingle would decide not to go out.

But to-day Daniel had another reason for feeling that he must be alone. This was the last Sunday. The last Sunday for that man. When the *next* Sunday came and he and Bingle and Chicknick were still moving slowly through this wonderland of beauty, that man would be—where? On what did his fate depend? Oh that *he* might win in this fight at Peniel, this fight with God. But he was sick with dread. He had no assurance. And his strength was failing. Suddenly the idea seemed to be interpreted on the physical plane. He stood still: the stones on the path above him looked to be playing him a trick: there was a tightening at his throat; and his heart was thumping hard enough to burst its bounds. Yes, he had been overtaxing himself. Chicknick, he remembered now, as he struggled back into consciousness again, had been at him of late once more.

But he must go on. He must. If he failed, he failed in a duty to that man, in perhaps the last duty which he could perform. The business of continuing that ascent began to symbolise to him the only achievement able to serve the man sitting there in Gippeswick gaol while, night and day, men watched him.

He stood up presently and again tried to climb. He was, perhaps, behaving rashly in urging himself. Yet slowly he went on. He must. Now and then he noticed how a man or woman, stealing off from one of the isolated cottages scattered on the hill-side, took the path with him. One couple, after eyeing him for a moment, waited for him: "You look weary."

Daniel smiled. "Maybe I am. That's no matter."

"Then, Thomas John, get the big man a glass of water. That"—to Daniel—"will help you up the hill like."

He thanked her; and with the aid of the refreshment he went on with his journey. For it must be accomplished. If he failed now, that man in Gippeswick gaol, counting his hours on earth . . .

It had been a hard enough struggle. He stood panting and with the blood in his face before the open door of the little crude church amid its gravestones, a little patch of white and grey amid high green slopes, so high above the blue sea stretching to the far horizon. Away to the east stood out the lesser rock promontory of the little Orme, while westward the scene became grand and rugged, with the frowning landmark of Penmaenmawr mountain dropping its fine line almost into the street of its village below.

Daniel stood there surrounded by that scene of wild enchantment; but he saw it not. He had come early to the church. Two or three only had gone in, and he stood in the doorway with his task so far accomplished. Then a curious thing happened. He put forward a foot, but drew it back sharply as if it had been struck. And indeed he saw before him a fiery sword holding him back. So far he had come; and now, no further. He broke away suddenly, lurching heavily out of the little walled churchyard, as a small man in black carrying a cassock darted through and, gazing for a moment in wild astonishment at the giant figure, ran on into the church.

Daniel staggered back upon the green down and lurched towards the path. It was not for him! On Rossmore's last Sunday when someone must plead for him, *his* effort had been refused of God!

He looked about him wildly : at the black ocean, under its eternal sky of night ; at the green, burnt black by the divine anger of God ; at a world made into a fit background for a soul so evil that it could triumph at the fall of another, and so bold that it could dare to hope to be advocate afterwards for that fallen. It was like his overweening pride to suppose that *his* sacrifices would be accepted of God.

. . . How he made his way down the mountain he never knew.

III

And to-morrow would be the day. Bingle had read that in the paper, and told him ; and yet that night Bingle, having no notion of the sense of responsibility which weighed down the rejected advocate, said a few words in effort to cheer him, and then, creeping into his bunk, fell asleep. Daniel, with the light casting shadows across the little, frowsy-smelling room which was all he could ever call home now, sat on, staring wild-eyed into the dimmest corner of the caravan. He must pray ; but the words would not come. He dared not use them.

Suddenly, towards two o'clock, he grew desperate. Rossmore would be sitting open-eyed in the county gaol, knowing that in six hours . . . and no soul praying for him.

Daniel gave up all pretence of rest, and before six he left the van and went to where, from the west shore, he got a view of the estuary of the Conway with the great hills piled up beyond, at first green and wooded and then dark with heather, and terminating high up in the fine rock crown of Talyfan.

He felt crushed by his sense of his own fearful inadequacy. A man was about to be pushed into Eternity, and there was none, save a poor ignorant giant, to pray for him, lest, in entering Eternity, he also entered into Hell. Yes, other than Daniel there was none. And *his* plea had been rejected ! God would not listen to him. He had told him so. And so that man, three hundred miles away in the county gaol, with two hours more to live . . .

The wretched giant stood there, in the new day, on the lonely shore where the sea spread to the foot of the grey-

brown rock of Conway mountain and had all the appearance of a lake shut in by hills. High in the east, behind the Denbigh slopes, came the sun red-gold in the cold blue sky.

Daniel had ceased to pray. He told himself that he was found out, that his prayer for Rossmore had been a dishonest prayer. He had prayed like a Pharisee, without love. He had rejoiced because his enemy was fallen : because Mabel had been given a lesson. And for the sin that had been in his heart not only he, but the man, must suffer. He still stood there. Presently, from somewhere beyond that new railway bridge that now crossed the river beside the old grey castle of Conway, there came the noise of a clock striking seven. When next the clock should strike. . . . He let the thought grow ; and then, from sheer weakness, he allowed himself to fall upon the soft yellow sand, with the whins around him and the sea-birds screaming mysterious assertions about God. He lay there trembling and crying out without making a prayer. Presently he told himself that " the hour must be near ended," and he shuddered violently. Then he lay very still, save that his lips moved. Not that he prayed : he dared not pray. . . . He had lain there without trying to count the minutes when, tinkling-clear, there came to him the first stroke of the bell in the clock tower. He had believed all night and until now, that when he heard he would cower closer to the earth, pressed down by his hideous conviction of spiritual futility.

So that why he was standing on his feet with his eyes streaming and triumph in his heart he knew not then nor afterwards.

Yet there he stood, his tongue no longer tied, his hope no longer trembling. Borne over those three hundred miles from Gippeswick gaol to the ear of this poor, distracted and elongated young man came an echo of the assurance comforting the sad heart of the soldier as once it had comforted a thief. . . . " This day . . . this day shalt thou be with Me . . ."

" I thank Thee . . . I thank Thee . . ." cried the man

with the ridiculous figure, brandishing absurd arms towards where he knew now that the ear of God listened.

And the last stroke of eight died out and was buried in the profound silence of mountain and of the sea that was like a lake.

Daniel waited the necessary minute: he had read that these things took only a minute. And then he turned and went quietly back to the camp.

CHAPTER XXX

IN Daniel's day it was accepted that a proportion of the population perished during youth from a "decline." But when, looking at Daniel, Chicknick feared this fate for his giant, he refused to accept it. As he had done before he called his tallest man aside.

"Now there's no use in you thinking I'm going to let you sneak out of life, young man! *Sneak*—that's what it is. You think you're going to Heaven and that it'll be less trouble there than here. Yes, I know what your game is."

He spoke, as always, with a mixture of annoyance and ironic good-nature. He had done well out of Daniel, and though it was contrary to business to admit a desire to help anybody because one liked him, he approved this remunerative and docile freak of his. "You think you'd be better off in the New Jeroose. *I'm* not so sure. You get the best vittals here that money can buy. And no work to do all day. Now in the next world there'd be eight hours' harp every day of your life. Oh yes, there would. I know; I've read about it. So, *you think* twice."

"I do be all right. I'm feeling good tidily," Daniel assured him.

"Are yer?—I say you *ain't*. You're not the man you were when you joined. You never been the same man since you was last at Gippeswick. That's my recollection."

"But I be all right. And I do be all right now."

"You're a liar, Daniel Windmill, when you tell me that. But I know what it is. It's the show life that you can't abide. Now honest—*can* you?"

"Well, to speak plain, I do hate that, Mr. Chicknick." He blushed as soon as he had said the words. But he knew them for the simple truth.

The fact was that never once had Daniel been really able to compromise with his complete and shuddering detestation of the life he lived. Not the shock caused first by his loss of Mabel and then by the incidents associated with Rossmore's flight, capture, and execution; not the desire to serve his mother; not the satisfaction he got from the thought that he had served her; not the incidents of the road nor the happiness he found in the sight of the hills and valleys so lately left behind; not even the tremendous spiritual excitement of his conversion, had made Daniel forget for a moment that he was an exhibited freak, nor served to reconcile him for a moment to the experience which each night he must go through. He was ready to believe, indeed, that his hatred of this ordeal was greater, just as his perceptions and susceptibilities had been made more acute, by his recent experiences. And if he did not often now confess aloud that he suffered miserably every night that he went upon the platform, or retired for public inspection to the small tent, he knew that he prayed nightly to be allowed again some day a life among the fields.

Since he had been given so suddenly his assurance about Rossmore, he had often wished to write to Mabel. But then, as he often told himself, it was unlikely that Mabel would understand. She was still blind: she would have no understanding of the fact, and therefore no happiness from it, that the only need her man could have experienced was the need which Daniel knew had been satisfied. She would be oppressed by the thought of his shame, not his need.

Poor Mabel, how confused her mind must be, and how full of false values!

Daniel found that his attitude towards his old sweetheart had undergone a change so profound as to make it difficult for his own comprehension. He discovered, for instance, that he knew her heart better than he knew his own. And because of his new understanding of her, he pitied her with a depth of pity of which once he could not have been capable. He found himself, indeed, regarding her from an altitude; and the discovery impressed him with the fact of

his own detachment. Once he had credited her with emotional reactions, spiritual perceptions of which she could never have been capable. His delighted fancy had endued her with powers that simply were not in her. He had *wanted* to believe in her response to natural beauty; and he *had* believed. But he now thought of her mind as a poor troubled thing that enjoined his pity, that constrained his service.

He began to think that there must be something paternal in his attitude to her. And he told himself this at the same time that he devoted to her a great deal of thought. The fact was that he was beginning to be aware of a responsibility. There were moments when he thrust the thought of this away; but he was still much occupied with these ideas when there occurred a new and serious diversion.

It came in the form of a letter in a hand he could not recognise. But the postmark of Oldborne excited in him an uneasiness as he broke the seal. When he had spread the paper before him he read "Oldborne Vicarage." So the writer would be the parson whom, so long before, he had found courage to interview about the After Life. He had a momentary leisure to smile. He was a little more confident about the after life to-day! That man, so set in his own assurance. . . . And yet he couldn't be sure. The Reverend Framlingham had preached sermons in which, in the light of new knowledge, Daniel could see something akin to his own stirrings. His eye ran over the sheet in his hand.

"DEAR DANIEL" [that was friendly, a condescension; "Windmill," without any prefix, would better have represented the gentry's method of addressing the lower orders]—"DEAR DANIEL,—Your mother is very ill. She has been ailing for some days now, but would not have you informed. But now she is very ill indeed, I am afraid, and you had better come home at once to see her." That was a marvellously kind and condescending letter. But its conclusion, "Your friend and vicar, H. FRAMLINGHAM," was still more so.

But Daniel only subconsciously apprehended the condescension of this parson from whom, so early in life, he had sought information regarding the soul's presentment in the next world. His immediate concern was with the idea that his mother was ill. He must at once see Chicknick.

The showman was characteristically impatient of human emotions. He had never ceased to suspect them. They were always interfering with his World's Best in some way or other. Somebody had a wife sick, or a child dead; and, forgetting greater things for less, must ignore the interests of the show and go away for a few days. Highly inconsiderate were these human emotions. He could remember a man once—a conjurer he was—who, merely because his daughter's life depended on her father's presence at her bedside, had deserted the show when it was at Brighton in August—when, in fact, place and time united to make the occasion the greatest opportunity of the year; and he had remained away for nearly a week.

He gave Daniel grudging permission; but the giant left with a sort of warning buzzing in his ears—a kind of hint unexpressed but nevertheless communicated, that if his mother did not die this time, he mustn't expect to be allowed to visit her on any future occasions of her proposing to quit the human scene.

But Daniel knew well enough that in this matter he would not again have to trouble his master. He read the Vicar's real message between the lines of the letter, and he knew that his mother was not going to get better. Well, he had tried to make life easier for her. Without any complacency he yet told himself that he had served her as well as he could: that he had enslaved himself to Chicknick for her; endured the torture of that nightly inspection by hordes of the stupid and callous for her. And she had been comfortable in a degree that savoured of her richer days. She had written and told him as much.

He took the bus from Gippeswick and reached the familiar place as dusk descended. He could not see anything but the house dimly outlined, and one little light behind a curtain.

But when the door was opened at his step he found himself met by old Mrs. Overbury, whom he understood had seen to his mother's needs when, once before, she had been ill. The old woman started back at sight of his long figure that stretched from step to lintel.

"Why, that's the giant, I do believe," she said, and then let her voice drop. "Giant, and him too late!"

Daniel was about to exclaim, when a dark figure pushed in front of the old woman and he saw Framlingham.

"What? It's you, Daniel? Come in, lad." And taking his hand he drew the tall man across the threshold. But as he went Daniel caught his head in the lintel, and suffered a minor pang at the thought that he must have added another inch to his frame; since, in other days, by merely ducking his head, he had escaped a blow.

"It's all over, my boy." So spoke Framlingham. He was feeling for words. There was, he knew, something notable in the whole of the situation. Also he was highly dissatisfied with the part he had himself taken in the affair in the past. He accused himself of want of insight, of a crass stupidity. He ought to have discovered a hint in that talk with a mere boy in the Vicarage garden long ago; and yet he had not done so. Only long afterwards had he picked up a suggestion here and there and constructed a story for his own instruction: only in these last months did he see, in his mind, the figure of a martyr to the filial obligation.

He tried to look at the pale young man standing there so sheer, and making the room look so absurdly contracted. And so that was the freak, the man the boys had mocked in the street; the son who had borne all for his mother's sake! And while he stared at Daniel and tried to find words, he began to mingle with his ideas of this giant, thoughts of the mother who had borne so strange a creature.

"Yes. She died quite quietly at seven o'clock this morning."

"I suppose, sir, she ask——"

"What? About you? Yes." He paused. He was

wondering whether she had understood, and if so how much. Particularly he marvelled at what had seemed her quiet, weary acceptance of that extraordinary service of her son's. But there was something to add on that head—something that, from the moment he had heard the words, he had covenanted with himself to hand on, with perhaps an emphasis her tired lips had been unable to bestow. He was about to speak when Daniel began another question.

"Did she go happy—I mane did she know that she wore Hisn?"

"His?" Framlingham repeated the word in a form so obviously that of a question that for a moment Daniel hesitated. He had not thought it possible that a professed clergyman could not comprehend that sort of allusiveness; but now he wondered whether, in fact, it must seem a sort of impertinence in himself, the layman, speaking of such things.

But having been challenged he was plainly intended to answer.

"I mane Jesus," said the giant uncomfortably.

"Oh, ah, yes." Framlingham had certainly sustained a shock. This was a very different young man from the boy who had spoken to him in the Vicarage garden. "Yes, yes. She was, I am sure——" He stopped. He was appalled by a sudden sense of reality. How often and how glibly had he used the words that he had been on the verge now of uttering; and never once had he been troubled by their unreality. And now here was this fellow, this illiterate, this famished-looking freak, convicting him of using mere forms of speech.

But he, too, must go on, as Daniel had had to do when checked.

"Yes. She was, I believe—I believe sincerely," he added, and smiled to think that he had used a word from the heart, "she was happy and went to God relying upon the—er—merits of her Redeemer."

"Then," cried Daniel, "thanks be to His name."

"Amen!" The word came from the lips of Framlingham quite involuntarily. He must, he told himself, sort his

ideas. Something seemed to be threatened, a collapse was imminent. But in the meantime he must act.

"You'll like to see her?"

And he began to lead the son to the mother who had borne him.

Afterwards, downstairs, Framlingham waited. He thought of that woman with what might have been called her resolute indifference. At some time or other she must, definitely, have accepted her son's sacrifice. He protested to himself that it was a sacrifice that no mother should have accepted. He did not accuse her of having exacted it, but he did believe that she had taken it when offered. She had, indeed, almost confessed as much. She had been so weary; she had strained for so long; and he had been very good as soon as his chance came: taking the burden off her.

Yes, said Framlingham to himself with a sort of anger, taking it off her and laying it on himself.

But he had promised himself to hand on that other communication, and he waited there for the descending step.

It was long in coming and the Vicar continued in his thoughts.

That woman, with her lined yellow face in such a startling contrast to her black hair, untroubled by a strand of grey, and like a girl's shining and glossy where it lay on the pillow. He remembered that, looking down at her, he had thought of a ship come home for the last time with her hull strained and her timbers gone under the water-line and yet with her upper works still fresh.

And he recalled her talk—all little sighs—of weariness, and once almost of content, as if the journey, being nigh over, one could sit down. There was no rapture on the one hand, nor agony on the other; and this man of long years of service "of a sort," as he mentally characterised it, had memories of rapturous souls springing to meet their Lord in the sky, and of poor things that rolled in their terror. But nothing of that had been here; not even a

sign of that curiosity which, as a student of his kind, he had observed with all his eyes when he had the chance; he did not get the chance often. People here did not slip away with "now-for-the-great-secret" speeches on their lips. And this woman, he was sure, hadn't a thought of curiosity. If she had had to put her attitude into words she would have said, as many other women worn out by the mere pressure of life must have done, "I'm too tired. I can't be bothered."

At last he heard the heavy, lurching step in the room overhead, and it struck him that there had been a long silence, no feet shuffling. Yes, Daniel would be praying. *Of course.* . . .

But he was coming now, this strange, elongated Evangelical, who unwittingly had put his own Vicar in his place!

The footsteps came upon the stairs: a clumsy descent followed. And then, there he stood in the kitchen again, his head dusting the ceiling.

The Vicar looked up, and was astonished anew, as more ingenuous intelligences had been, by the mere fact of height. But he brought his eye down to Daniel's hips as he spoke.

"Well, well. These things have to be. You know that, of course," as if he made common cause with so eminent an evangelist and accepted a fellow-worker. "It's the words of the Book. From dust we come and to dust we must return. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away."

"Blessed be the name of the Lord," said Daniel.

The Vicar looked up sharply. But he knew he was in error: the young man had not meant that. Even now he did not realise, nor was he touching upon the fact of a promised relief. And suddenly another idea crossed the Vicar's mind: once before they, himself and this young man, had used the words of the Burial Service. "We shall all be changed." The words rose in his mind. . . .

But Daniel knew nothing of the supreme significance to himself of his mother's death.

"You will stay till—everything is finished."

"Yes," said Daniel. "He say I can stay three days."

"And then you will go back?"

"Yes. I promised. I could be away but for three days."

The Vicar paused; for the moment had come.

"She said to me she wasn't sorry to go. And then she said something about you."

"Yes?" Daniel put the word like a question.

"Yes. Something about that you needn't go on now."

"Go on?"

"In the show. If you didn't like it, that is. Perhaps you haven't any particular objection."

"Objection?" Daniel repeated the word stupidly. He seemed really to have his mind elsewhere. It had not occurred to him, positively, Framlingham was ready to swear, it had not occurred to him that he was free! He had not known whether his mother still lived till he reached her door, and thinking of her in sickness he had conceived of himself serving her all the more. And his mind had not time to react to the implications of her death.

"You wouldn't need to go on now," said Framlingham, using a cheerful, even a boisterous note.

"No. I do not need to go on no more."

He repeated the words dully. But already far away in his consciousness, like the faint glimmer of a dawn that faced a heavy sky, that idea must have begun to break through. He need not be a freak. . . .

CHAPTER XXXI

I

BY the time Daniel went back to the show (now at Manchester), the giant, though scarcely conscious of the drama of emancipation, knew that his return to Chicknick was merely automatic, a simple surrender to habit.

Without a doubt he was free. From the train he had watched the fields and the trees lifted high upon a far-away ridge and seen in them a symbol of freedom, the only kind of freedom he cared for; the freedom of the open country through which the winds blew and where the birds sang.

He had forbidden himself to dwell upon this aspect of his mother's death lest he could find himself guilty of using consolation in an ugly way. But he had only to make his first appearance on the platform after his return—an appearance made hideous by Chicknick's giving the audience an explanation of the three days' absence—to realise how entirely hateful this life was and how full of light and hope was the alternative.

He used to speculate sometimes about his mother. He wondered if she had had any conception of how intolerable he found the life with which he served her. Had she suspected the nature of the sacrifice he had made?

He put the questions aside again, fearing to convict himself of a disloyalty.

Upon his return he had given notice to Chicknick:

"I come to you for the sake of my mother, and my mother be dead." The showman could get nothing else from this obstinate mule of a giant.

As the time passed Daniel could not keep himself from that growing satisfaction in the reminder that within a space of five weeks—he was bound to give a month's notice to his master—he could be labouring in a field at Oldborne, or lying on his back among the soft brown bracken in the woods.

"Yes," he told Bingle, much disturbed, for one ordinarily so little moved, by the thought of his friend's departure. "Yes, I'll have my own life again; I will, you'll see. I'll be diggin' the land, the rare smelly old Suffolk land. Or I'll be layin' on my back in the woods, watchin' the ways of the birds. A bird have his own ways, and you'll see me spyin' out upon the stars beyond the leaves that make a rare cunnin' roof for a man that sit below."

"You're a proper countryman," said the cockney Bingle. "I don't take to country myself. Ain't enough to do. But is work so easy got, Little 'Un? You can't live without work and you ain't the figure of a labouring man on the land, to my thinking, same as I've seen when I've been with the show in them parts." He looked shrewdly, judgingly at Daniel, and spoke part of his thought—though he was a man that kept a good deal to himself. He had quick suspicions, and had one now that his fellow-exhibit was really unfit even for the more or less passive work he did in the show.

"No," he went on, "I don't see yer earnin' a day's wyge proper with a spud fork in yer 'and, or at the plough."

Daniel laughed. "You think I be worse'n I am. But don't you worrit. I be good tidily. And what's more, the parson there—over at Oldborne I mean—tell me to wroite to him and he'd find me work. And he have found me a light job with old Catcherpool that's a farmer out our way. It won't be much in the way o' money. But, well, I'm not needin' money for more'n myself now."

He broke off and Bingle nodded quickly.

For Daniel had actually had Framlingham's promise. That shepherd of souls, unhappily conscious of an omission in his duty to the tallest of the young rams of his fold, had seen a chance to make a small atonement. The sin of

neglect could be a little covered by an action that was emphatically attentive. He had gone instantly to Catcherpool, ere Daniel had yet returned to the show, exacted the promise, and then, seeing Daniel off at the station, had given him the news.

" Your mother . . . she had it in mind that you would no longer need to follow this way of life. Unless you prefer it to the land."

" I can't git back there."

" You can. For I have seen a man——"

Yes, Daniel had had an offer of work. During his mother's life he could not have been able to accept the few poor shillings offered. They could have been the means of keeping only one whose needs were very small, who lived alone, who was contented to sleep in a loft and to accept meals as part (the better part) of his pay. But Parson Framlingham had described his state to Catcherpool, who, being a humane man and also one apparently with a disrelish for shows and an instinctive dislike of the idea that a man should exhibit his physical oddities for money, had consented to accept the giant's services.

" I can't pay more'n I've said. He hain't got the strength of a man, and from what you say, what strength he have do be declinin'. It be honest of him, or you, to say so much, and I'll bear him no ill-will for his honesty. I don't like to think of any man, though, makin' a show of himself. The good God never mane a man made in His image to be a show, so I'll pay the bor pocket-money, and give him food, and he can come back to his old home country if he want to."

Catcherpool genuinely disliked the idea of directing public attention to the physically abnormal. Weighing nineteen stone, he could still remember hints given on market days, even whispers that *his* chance would come when next the show came that way.

II

Daniel walked about, his mind victorious and elevated by his new hope of freedom. His emancipation was assured. And all sorts of subconscious reminders had begun to come to him with hints of the great happiness that would be his with the return to old scenes. Vague sweet nostalgias, hints of bird song, visions of the fields, shadowy enough save where a poppy burnt its passionate significance into a picture of a corn-field, came to him, quickening his country soul. Catcherpool's farm, he did not forget, was a good two miles from Oldborne, and he need rarely see the boys in the street. And even if he met them, he did not know but what they were by now a little uncertain about him or were even ready to be impressed by the fact that he was a public character. But, whether or not, he would rarely visit Oldborne High Street. Of that he was sure. The High Street had no happy memories for him. It merely brought to mind petty persecutions, failures to find employment; and—Mabel. And he had tried, at last with success, to keep Mabel from his mind. Oldborne, as he would know it now, would be a place in which there had been a winnowing of memories, that kept from him only remembrances of lying in lonely fields, listening to the lark, walking through green meadows, and lifting eyes to some far-away hill, with a break in the trees, or other occupations of the kind.

He had already begun to taste a peace, which supported him through the bitterest hours of humiliation, when a stupid and gaping public came about him in the marquee, asking him questions and exclaiming in his presence at his surprising intelligence.

For a week he had been revelling in this sense of coming freedom. In twenty-four days from then he would be far from these crowded cities, these places of noisy, knowing men, jostling one another even in their enjoyments. He would be alone with the quiet Suffolk fields. The whistle of a blackbird would take the place of the sad howls and angry roars of imported and imprisoned beasts, or of the

shrill and empty laughter of vulgar city hordes. Aye, and how he would lie there in the woods, so still that not a creature would alter its ways. They had long ago learnt to understand him as he them, and had given him the freedom of their state. It was one of his sweeter thoughts that these creatures, so easily alarmed by man, who fled at the first rumour of so small and poor a thing as Robert Lanes, showed no fear in the presence of the monstrosity that was himself. *They* judged in other terms than men's. Perhaps their eyes measured neither height nor girth, but assimilated only the idea of the spirit of a man. It thrilled him to think and believe that to these birds he might appear something smaller than a blade of grass, or a pebble in the earth at his foot. He rejoiced, and again he rejoiced, with the thought that, so soon, he would be among his friends.

They were at Liverpool again when there came to Daniel a letter from a brother of Polly that Daniel remembered serving in the dairy, saying he was for America; "emigrating they call it." The young man was to sail from Liverpool, of all places! Daniel hurried off a letter. "We shall be showing there. I could see you."

He would gain a little talk of Oldborne—a sort of anticipatory taste. The thought of it made him increasingly cheerful, so that Bingle noticed it.

"You might be expectin' to meet yer gurl."

"It fare to be like it, I dessay," said Daniel, smiling, "but I reckon the country that one love do be like that. And it do be the talk of the country that I'm going to, that promise me some pleasure, Fatty."

And the hope of the coming freedom grew hourly in beauty and attraction. He exulted aloud. "In a few days now I'll be with them birds and trees and fields——"

In such a mood he met young Rattle, Polly's brother, who, quite honestly, held Oldborne's view of their giant. "Somethin' funny about that there giant. Heap o' use he wore in the world till he went in a show."

Like most of his kind, away from those who might accuse him of taking the giant too seriously he was prepared to treat Daniel as a normal being, though there were moments when he scarcely concealed his good-natured contempt.

And when Daniel first spoke of his hunger for the sight of Suffolk again, young Rattle eyed him with scorn.

"To think you come straight from them fields."

"Them fields? What fields?"

"Why, them around Oldborne—my dear Oldborne that seem every day more beautiful——"

"Don't you talk about Oldborne being beautiful to me, Dan'l Windmill! Glad I am to be out of it. Whoi! I be going to them there countries across sea 'cause there seem to be nawthen to do over here. A heap o' good Oldborne be to me! And then here you go, that's earnin' good money in t' show, talkin' of goin' back." He spoke without heat, because he felt he had an intellectual advantage over this poor giant. But it really was all very silly.

"Still," Daniel hesitated, "it do seem a mighty pleasant thing to be goin' back."

"You been there since you quitted home?"

He broke off suddenly. He remembered that the man had lately "buried his mother." But he remembered something else. This was the man about whom there still circulated a story; a story of a face looming out of a mist and staring in through high windows as a woman took her mate before an altar in Stowe. . . . He had never quite understood about that, and perhaps it was curiosity that made him talk now.

"You won't find many changes when you git back," he said, "in Oldborne or, come to that—Stowe. They say that there mawther that have our Polly's job for a bit and that marry the soldier that was swung, be sadly now."

Daniel started. "What's the matter?"

Rattle watched him narrowly and misread, as he was like to do. ("Still smitten.")

"Whoi, she starve, they do say. She got a baby to keep. And her old father die not so long ago and her mother have to earn as she can. They be in a rare old

mess. None like to have her—I mean Mabel—to work because of her name. It do be rale hard for her."

"I be terrible sorry," said Daniel gravely. As yet, certainly, none of the implications of this news had occurred to him.

"And there ain't nawthen to be done," went on Rattle. "She's young enow still, and some say she might marry. But she lost most of her looks, and beside, who'd want her now with her name? *She'll* never get another chance—not her."

But Rattle had something to add about his own future, and the subject dropped.

As for Daniel, he thought only of his coming escape. The talk with Rattle had given him a new longing to hear this Suffolk speech always in his ear. He remembered places when he had overheard it exchanged between man and man. There had been *some* men who had spoken him civilly; and he had an idea that, now that he was older and had put by a few pounds, they would treat him with tolerance if not respect. And in any case he should have little cause for troubling, since he would have work on the farm of a man who meant to be good to him. The heart of the giant rose within him as he dwelt upon the promised freedom.

And so this thought had grown in his mind, healing his wounds and making whole the body of his spirit. But it was while thus he rejoiced, and began noticeably to wear an air of peace, that the giant became conscious of an interruption of his assurance of relief and escape. He was perplexed, and deeply so. He could not avoid one conclusion at last.

This interruption had coincided with his talk with Rattle and with his having news of Mabel Rossmore.

And yet he was still perplexed. For he could not discover in which way this news could bear upon his approaching emancipation.

In the light of what happened afterwards this perplexity of the giant's may seem disingenuous. Yet it was not. His mental processes were quick, yet they were only quick

enough to discover that over the fair horizon which he had seen opening out before him there spread a shadow—the shadow, as it seemed, of Duty. It was a shadow that, being magnified, blotted out field and tree and hedgerow, and that, being so dark, silenced the song of the larks and set the live things of the earth and forest scampering for safety to their remote lairs. The world was covered with the shadow of Duty to a woman.

Daniel Windmill struggled to understand. And perhaps, when he understood, he struggled to escape conviction.

But before the second fortnight was ended he was approaching a conclusion.

CHAPTER XXXII

HE found that his thoughts of Mabel continued to be extraordinarily detached. Always he was conscious of a deadness. He could not say that he had no sense of excitement. He must always view her through a bank of cloud. The sweet, vivid passion was dead. The thought of touching her, of fondling the velvet softness of the hand she had kept so miraculously soft and yielding, no longer gave him those queer choking thrills.

And yet he could not say that he was indifferent to her. Their souls, having once mixed, he could never believe that between them there was nothing—no bond, no implicit understanding.

True, when he had seen her married he had banished her from his heart, for so did this simple, pure soul conceive his duty, not only to her, but to his kind and to that God whom he worshipped in his thoughts.

Finally, he had tried to tear from himself even the memory of her name. But in that last attempt he had failed.

In his greatest suffering hate refused to spring. And now, with Rossmore dead and disgraced, and his wife reported near to starvation, and with their child bearing a felon's name, hate became impossible for ever. He felt nothing but pity—a great overwhelming pity such as found a natural home in Daniel's heart. His mind dwelt upon that little struggling household, with Hathage dead after years of dissipation, and his wife with an eye always for her own ends alone. Yes, the young wife could expect no aid from home. And whence else could she expect anything? The circumstances of her husband's end were not likely to attract friendship to her. It was said that

she had not been civil to the parson who had come to her with the kindness of condescension. She was repudiated by the village. Certainly she would be expected to go out to work; and those hands that he had loved for their softness must be stained and coarsened by daily toil.

For he still saw Mabel as a woman young and beautiful, who once, in some strange phase of his past existence, had stirred in him deep emotions and occupied in his mind a place of immense and even overwhelming consequence; and who now was faced by the twin horrors of starvation and contumely. Of his precise attitude towards her to-day he was certainly not clear. There was that deadness of feeling of which alone he was conscious. He could not discover in himself any passion, nor any vivid excitement even, though, presently, he forced himself to search for them. For only the discovery of their presence would explain the inexplicable manner in which two ideas—that of his approaching, and passionately longed-for freedom, and this of Mabel's present suffering—became involved.

He thought himself, indeed, opposed by some obscure but certainly active Force which always deliberately shrouded itself while pressing on towards its indiscoverable purpose. Presently he began to convict himself of the character of a victim: then, rebelling against this conviction, he found that he wished to be regarded by himself as a free agent in whatsoever he did in this matter.

For by now it had become to him "this matter"; that is, a design to be executed and that called for execution. He had a mysterious talk with Chicknick; and the show heard the astonishing news that the giant, though he had still three weeks to serve, was being granted a second holiday.

Daniel took a train, came to Gippeswick, and sought the little clumsy bus in the narrow street.

"Why, if it bain't the giant agin already," cried the old driver, working his swollen eye from long Dodderian habit, and wagging the chin from which the long and dirty beard depended. He brushed a greasy coat-sleeve across his mouth and nostrils. "And how go it, giant?" He spoke with

a sort of respect, for it was well known by this that the giant was making good money. Hadn't he himself paid from his own pocket to see this man whom he was now being allowed to observe free of charge?

"Oh, I do not so bad," answered Daniel, taking the place allowed him in the talk. Even yet he found this new and somewhat unassured attitude towards himself a wonderfully agreeable change from the old easy insolence.

Two or three other passengers joined the bus, but while they feasted eyes upon the sight of a giant—*this* giant—they were from Stowe, not Oldborne, and only knew Daniel by repute. So that he settled himself back in his corner with the thought to console him that he would not have to talk. He crouched low, as he always did, to disguise the fact of his height as much as possible, and hoped that, having got away so well, he would not be recognised on the road.

The old bus lumbered over the cobbles through the narrow streets, until presently it came into the little country suburb which was all the town then possessed. When the railway bridge had been crossed, all signs of city life were behind; and looking about him the giant could enjoy familiar scenes again. He had settled himself upon the right side of the bus so that he looked out across the moorland eastwards. For miles it lay there spread before him, with gorse blooming and running out to where the earth had been tamed to crops. There was only a far-away ascent visible in the ground: in the nearer distance there were but undulations that scarcely made valley or hill.

This country had its own character, its individual quality of beauty. It bore the air of being free and untroubled, which is the distinctive note and effect of a moorland swept by sea-winds. The grasses swayed in the breeze that came there from the ocean, and there was colour and the movement of birds and coneys. It was a scene that the giant had known of old; and he watched it now following the face of the heather to where, miles away, it met a mottled sky. Didn't he know that heath and its whispers when the wind blew in long gusts—the gusts that, striking

about the house, made moaning music? Such a wind and a sky like that with quick-moving clouds that seemed hastening on to a business too mysterious to be stated, filled him always with an inexpressible sense of excitement and adventure.

And this was part of the fabric of life as he had lived it so sweetly and so long ago. How sweetly he had lived it he had only realised when he saw it presented to him again in terms, not merely of a possible thing, but a thing definitely promised. He had but to stretch forth a hand and accept, for this life to be his again. . . .

When he left the bus at the edge of the village, and the noisy farewells of the driver were a mere echo now in an atmosphere which had recovered its serenity, he stood for a moment drawing a deep breath. In some sense even all the exquisite reminders of the sweetness and loveliness of this earth were but an anticipation of the moment that now approached. For here, first of all, was the great oak of the village, noble and prodigious, in whose dark shade Elizabethans had stood; and here were the fields that had been his and that should be his again. Yonder smoke up against that array of guardian oaks was the Catcherpools' house, the smoke of whose chimneys was even at that moment being winnowed by this divine wind from the sea. Call it an east wind—he cared not—it was Life. And anyone standing by Catcherpool's door must even now be hearing the wind's sweet, high, thrilling scream and sigh, like a voice lifted in passion and then dying down into a moan. There must be spirits in that wind, in *all* winds; but in that wind most of all.

And over there, on his right, as he moved up the lane, was his own wood of mystery and beauty. He came to the spot, gazing across the little clearing in the foreground where the crowded oak and elm and beech stood like the open walls of a house. A long slender poplar swayed to the breeze; and the giant, following its line, had a new thought. How must that long thing be swept as the spirit of the wind elected; how little it could withstand a force exerted from without. And the poplar was not alone.

Near to it stood another long figure, himself, whose length was his undoing; though, by a kind of miracle of transmutation, the physical was mysteriously blended with the spiritual, so that the effect upon certain minds of the physical spectacle of his height made for his martyrdom. Here, indeed, was something very strange, a genuine rubbing out of the line between the physical and the spiritual. His body was a physical thing; yet consciousness of the length of it completely affected his mind and outlook, and the minds and outlooks of all who considered him.

He threw those thoughts aside and considered his wood again as a whole. And as he did so, its beauty and appeal grew almost unbearably sweet.

He could have gone in there and stroked individual leaves of the trees, spoken to them, said tender things; as it were, made love to them. Love? He drew a deep breath. But he had not forgotten; only, he kept the thought of her at a distance. From where he stood he could see the very glade through which he had led her. Under that green canopy he had looked up, she beside him, to the stars. . . .

The immense importance to the future of these thoughts of a passionate hour lost in the past almost choked him. Yet still he stood there watching. And a thrush suddenly sang against the wind; and far away he caught a glimpse of the white inside-lining of a rabbit's tail, shining where the light caught it against the inner blackness at the foot of the trees.

It seemed to the giant as he watched that never had the sights he knew so well and loved, thrilled him as now they thrilled. They caught him by the throat, in their sweetness and poignancy so that tears came into his eyes. Only now did he realise how the thoughts of these things had dwelt in the background of his mind, supporting him through the shame of the show years; how deep their roots were and how much a part of the substance of his spiritual life. He had seen lovely places in between the ugly and the garish and the towns: particularly he remembered his first vision of the Welsh hills. But for every

man there is one heaven upon earth; one haven for his soul; one harbour for his tired heart.

And his was here. Verily it was here! And only now did he know it. To turn away from it seemed to him impossible. To go back into the main road behind him and feel that every step removed him, not nearer to, but further from, this scene, was to inflict on himself an agony of pain. He must be allowed to stay here; to go in among those trees and lie down. The call from them grew so insistent, indeed, that he took a step forward.

And then, with the strange air of a new authority over himself, the giant took a step back, as if he deliberately intended to return the step he had taken. Where he had stood, to that point precisely he retired. He took one more long look. And then, turning quickly on his heel, he marched briskly into the lane and, setting his face towards the main road from which he had so lately come, he set off.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN that tiny kitchen he looked like one of those elongated shadows of a man rather than the substance. He trembled violently: for long now he had been finding that he had not even the old control over his nervous system. And though he knew what he intended, he still seemed as if the purpose would not so support him that he was indifferent to the effort. The labour of walking from Oldborne, coupled with the strong emotions which had oppressed him there, had used up the greater part of his strength.

It had been Mrs. Hathage who had opened; and because of the quality of novelty which he seemed to present both in his person and in his circumstances, she had given him a hearty welcome.

"Come into the kitchen, giant," she said, "there be only my darter." Then she broke off, scrutinising him in frank curiosity. Funny that giant should come here like this. Giant had been sweet on Mabel. Well, people didn't marry giants. Think of being seen with a giant!

All the same. . . . For she thought, in her hard way, of Rossmore. She was a woman whose outlook to all life was callous. Nothing, even of the most tragic kind, had much power to impress her. And she searched the giant now coldly, as she might search the dead on the off-chance that she might find something useful. Giant's coming might be of service to herself. With a husband gone—the man had died three months before—she waited for any turn of the wheel of luck. So now, having advanced into the room, she said in her metallic voice:

"An old friend have come!" And the giant, following, came to the doorway and halted.

The young woman sitting near the table, and rocking a sleeping child, looked up sharply; and Daniel's large mild eye met her hard, flashing one. It must have been plain to him that she had changed, that the soft glowing rotundity of cheek and bosom had sunk into lines. How dark were the hollows, too, all about the eyes! And there was a certain carelessness. . . . A defective tooth in the centre of the upper row, noticeable whenever she spoke. The hand holding the child was thin and rough and with the nails broken.

Only the ghost of an old beauty still haunted the face and figure. And yet more than her loveliness was fallen away!

"Well—giant?" she said quickly. He wished that they did not call him that. "But," as if she read his thought, "I remember you don't like that name. Though really when I see you come in at that door I won'er how much higher I'd have to look before I got to the top. You bigger'n ever. Bigger'n——"

She stopped. She was about to say, "when I saw you last," but on an impulse said it not.

"Yes, I'm no less than I wore," he acknowledged, perhaps a little wearily. "And I reckon that's jest as well," he added.

The pair looked at him suddenly, not understanding, but made curious.

Perhaps it had been his wish, rather than his design, to get their attention. But he must have seen that he had gained it now, for he hurried to use his opportunity.

"If I weren't—big," he half choked over the word, "I'd not be here." He was examining the girl now, trying to discover her condition, and assuring himself that he had not heard more than the truth. She was caught by poverty. Her clothes told him that. She still wore a coat he could remember, rusty and stained and tattered now. She was no neat hand for mending. And as he looked her over in sorrowing sympathy, and yet with a private sickness of heart for a matter that concerned himself alone, she turned her eye upon him. What his words meant she could have

no idea. Yet the idea was growing in her that the giant was here with a purpose.

"I come to say," began the giant, "that if you'd let me—if you'd not be too proud—I'd like to walk out with you."

"With *me!*" She screamed the words in astonishment, then began to laugh, and finally sobered herself suddenly as her mother, quick to see certain aspects of the matter, hastened an intervention.

"Jest you let giant say what be in his mind and don't you receive him in that runty woi of yours." Daniel, she had heard, earned very good money: she was weary already of helping to keep her daughter and her daughter's child from starvation. "Go you on, giant," she commanded.

Daniel drew a deep breath, steadying himself with his hand against the back of a chair. He had not expected that words would come so hard.

"I have been thinkin', Mabel"—he corrected himself—"Mrs. Rossmore——"

"No need o' that," burst in Mrs. Hathage. "That bain't no name we've any more use for."

"I was won'erful sorry about all that," he said, with a curious firmness, as if he would withhold her from weak or idle words. "But," he went on, "we'll not speak of that there now. I come here to have a quiet talk." His eye rested on Mrs. Hathage, who, from no wish to conciliate him, but merely because she saw that she best advanced her own interest by departing, passed to the door.

"I'll leave you. You'll have things to say to one another; talk over old toimes, and you'll——"

"No, we won't, mother," said Mabel, suddenly beginning to laugh again. "Giant isn't thinkin' what he's sayin'. But even if he be I don't want to hear."

"You want to be faithful to your dear husband, o' course," sneered the mother, who now abandoned her intention to withdraw.

"You hold your tongue, mother," said Mabel. "Even if one husband swung I don't want to marry a lamp-post. I *do* want a man."

Perhaps she did not see the odd little contraction of pain which crossed the giant's face.

"Beggars can't be choosers," her mother reminded her. "You won't find young men comin' round to marry a gaol-bird's widow and the mother of a murderer's child. And as for giant, he have claim to be better'n some."

"Hear me out, Mabel, anyhow," pleaded the giant, following up the plea advanced so oddly on his behalf.

"You'd have my name, but I don't say that count, except that people moight trouble you who remember things. But you'd never be troubled with me. And you know I earn what is thought to be quite good money. I told my master I wore leavin' him, and he offer to pay me better'n ever."

"What did you want to leave him for?" She was studying him acutely. And he could not answer her question. It was in this moment, indeed, that she came as near as she was ever to come to the secret of giant's sacrifice and surrender. As she and her mother stood in the narrow kitchen, discussing in sharp tones, and in terms of their shallow judgments, the fact which he seemed to signify, and the idea which he appeared to be laying before them, they missed something that had its own quaint element of sublimity.

He still did not answer the question she had put, and she followed it with another.

"What—what did you mane?" Here she hesitated.

He understood her perfectly.

"Mane? To marry you," he said simply.

"And you really want—*that?*" She said these words, beginning to believe them in the very sense most completely opposite from all his thoughts of her. He proposed a sacrifice, and she now believed that what he wanted was a belated satisfaction of appetite. Quickly she changed her attitude. It was not in her long to be humble, and she was already throwing off the doubt that a man should desire her. "You mane that?"

"Yes, truly," said Daniel.

She did not precisely ask him if he loved her still. She

was trying to assimilate the idea that this object before her would presently be her husband.

"And if I let you—have me, you'd not always be about?"

He smiled a little mournfully. "I couldn't be that very easy," he said. "You see, the show go on tower most of toime."

"Then I'd loike to think it over." He tried to disguise from himself the fact that his heart leapt.

"No, no, you don't. It don't be fair to giant!" It was the masterful Mrs. Hathage, who, as usual, had intervened, seeing her own interest in jeopardy. "You give him his answer now."

He could feel Mabel's eye upon him considering him, weighing her undoubted distaste for a freak husband against the freak's assurance that his money would be the only sign of him with which she need be troubled.

"Very well, giant," she said calmly now.

He drew a sigh, that seemed to the elder woman a sigh of relief and happiness.

"Then that do be settled," he said. "I don't know," he hesitated, "about being called in church and them sort o' things." Though he had planned this affair he was astonished at the swiftness with which it had developed.

"I'll manage things with passon," broke in Mrs. Hathage.

"Same place as before," she added.

The giant put out a hand, and Mabel at least saw how pale he had grown. His sudden agitation infected her, for she, too, lost colour and stood up at the table. Suddenly she was conscious of the child in her arms. The thought crossed her mind that for this, also, he would be responsible. Well, that was better than going into service—the fate her mother prepared for her.

"You'll be writing, giant—I mean Daniel?" she said quickly, to make a screen to cover up a variety of thoughts in her mind.

"Whoi, yes. I did think I'd do that," he answered. "And now I'll have to be gittin' back." He hesitated. Then, very slowly and gravely, he stepped across, and

bending over Mabel, before she knew what was happening, he kissed her. The girl started away, spluttering.

"You're in a hurry! Beginnin' early."

"That fare to be the right thing to do!" he answered, with a quaint seriousness.

"Whoi, of course it be!" interjected Mrs. Hathage, who now rejoiced openly. For such a lucky turn as this she had never bargained. "Come along, Mr. Windmill." He was to be Mr. Windmill, or Lord Windmill now, if so be that he could take this daughter and this grandchild off her hands. "There's the door—the carpenter made it. And mind you wroite! And don't you make it so long afore you come again. And you leave *me* to fix the matter with passon. And so good-day to you."

A moment later he was outside, walking along the rough road beside the old black hut. He remembered that he had scarcely troubled to look at the hut as he had passed it before; and even now he found himself observing it with an eye only half engaged.

When he reached the street where the bus started he got into the vehicle and took a seat in such a position that when, a little later, he passed beside the lane leading to the wood at Oldborne, he could see nothing that should remind him of the sights and sounds he should never taste again, nor of the freedom which now could never be his.

CHAPTER XXXIV

I

THOSE who used to tell a story of a wedding in a mist, and of the face of a tall man that peered in through the window, had no exact tale of a wedding in which this tall man was principal. For her own reasons Mrs. Hathage went quietly to work, but when she put things to the Vicar of Stowe, that good man, with a compassionate eye upon the widow and the fatherless, and less of a natural intuition than his brother of Oldborne, saw Daniel's proposal as something that was entirely proper to the circumstances. There was enough to do to supply the needs of the poor, and these mouths the less would lighten the anxieties of the parish. And so early on a bright morning, with larks making a marriage song, and blue-bells blowing about like wedding bells, the giant took to wife his old love, with his body her to worship and with all his worldly goods her to endow. Mabel, if the local record, such as it was, is to be believed, was very calm; indeed, as an ill-natured observer reported, "*too* calm. Quite ready to get a well-to-do man to keep her though taking the name of a freak, as she wore."

They went back to the Hathages' to eat a meal. And then Daniel got away. That was part of the arrangement.

Mabel was piqued at his acquiescence, and even ready to reverse this last "arrangement" of hers. "Of course I couldn't have a thing like that . . ." she had argued.

But she would have preferred that he should press to stay.

Still, perhaps it was as well that he should be off the premises as soon as possible.

As for Daniel, he went quietly and willingly, and at once.

He was astonished at the ease with which he walked out of the house in which he had just arrived with his bride, and set his face towards Gippeswick and the old bondage.

Mrs. Hathage had carefully constructed a formula. "Giant had to go back to the show, you see."

"Won't she go along o' *him* now?"

Mabel's mother had calculated on that question. "Go along o' him? Not her. They won't have that." There was no need to add to the criticisms of which her daughter was the victim, one that she had only married the giant for what he could bring her. "The showman say no wives allowed."

The idea was very quickly established that this couple would not see much of one another. But it was soon noticed that Mabel grew plumper, and began to wear new clothes again. Everybody understood. "Giant," said old Mrs. Knights, who set up to be the first gossip in Stowe, "Giant, he earn good money. And he send her pretty nigh all he earn. Though they do say that when he wore last over he had something to say about the child. More were to be done for him, he said. I don't wonder. She were all ribbons and laces and all manner of what; and him in rags. But with that there mother of hers to watch her, she can't play too many tricks."

The charge seems to have had something in it. The child still wore an air of rather serious neglect. And when Daniel next came to Stowe he was hurt to see his condition. This neglected babe took quickly to him, and without his invitation began to call him "dad"; and very gently he had said his say both to Mabel and her mother. Mabel had pouted, called him "freak" and gone out of the room. And when he had departed the issue might have seemed in doubt. But Mrs. Hathage had her word to contribute. She wasn't going to be disgraced anyhow. It looked bad to neglect the child; and giant, though he might be soft, might one day put his foot down.

" If he did that," sneered Mabel, " he'd crush life out of everything."

" Well, don't you be a fool. He do be all you've got, and lucky you are to have got him. You hain't no looks now, what with your skinny face and your ugly teeth."

It ended in things being a little better for the child. But the truth wasn't put quite bluntly for perhaps a year; a year during which there had been one of those rare visits from the giant. To him her mother acted a sort of deference in the hope of something for herself. It was when he came in upon them with little warning that Mabel, starting up, cried out:

" Whoi didn't you write? Who was to know you were comin' like this here? "

" I didn't know myself," he said mildly. " But we were at Cambridge, and I seed there wore a cheap ticket to this way, so I thought I'd give you a look."

" Don't you waste your money agin. You send me the fare. I could do a deal better with it."

When he had gone, Mabel walked about the room. " Comin' in like that! " she said.

" You woren't very affectionate to your dear husband," sneered her mother.

" Husband! He make me sick! And everybody laughin' at me behind my back 'cause I'm married on a freak. I wish I'd never married him! I wish I'd gone into slavery or anything, starved even."

" Yes. You can talk. You'll never go to work. You loike to sit at home and fold your hands, my gal. That do be your kind. But don't you worrit! One of these days you'll perhaps get your chance——"

" What do you mean? " demanded Mabel with shrill savagery.

" Oh, *you'll* see! " and Mrs. Hathage turned away, laughing a curious, shrill laugh.

II

Perhaps if Daniel had been asked to interpret Mrs. Hathage's words he could have done so. But the interpretation of his own feelings was a less simple matter. He had withdrawn his notice at once. He had, moreover, confessed his intention of marrying. The showman had eyed him curiously for a moment, considered rapidly, and decided that it was all for the best. Any man who was fool enough to marry a woman with a family bound himself securely to his master, whoever he might be. There would be no further trouble with the giant. Nor was there.

Daniel surrendered quite deliberately to a perpetual serfdom. He had never believed that he could hate the daily ordeal as now he hated it. For hitherto there had always been a chance of escape; and the consoling hope of the woods and the birds. But now these were denied him. Always now he must be a show, a mere freak for men and women to stare at and comment on with no consideration for his feelings. The right to comment was implicitly conveyed with the ticket of admission for which they had paid. He was denied all human dignity: he was non-human—as little of a man as the performing fleas or the picture of Vesuvius in eruption. His achievement was not a spiritual one. It was something entirely physical. It depended less on mental or spiritual qualities than anything man could do. Even a tinker or a pedlar selling buttons had to use his brain. But he could be the imbecile that these people thought he was.

His achievement was, indeed, in effect another degradation of the soul of man. He walked, a monument to show the fact that Nature had her vagaries.

He was not in the image of God if his face was not inspired by the spirit of God. And it need not be inspired by anything to make a show.

He was delivered to these people now to be a show and to taste for ever the denial of his humanity.

He had done this thing deliberately. When the way of escape was open; when he could have won back to the

fields and spent his life there; when, instead of preparing himself each night to stand before the flaring jets of flame so that men should see him the better, he could have lain on his back in the woods staring up at the golden stars—he had deliberately chosen to remain a slave to this life. Why?

Whenever he put that question to himself he paused. For he could not clearly answer himself. The deadness of feeling which before had oppressed him was always present now. Sometimes it seemed to him that he must still love: yet he had never sought to live the life of a man married to a woman, nor ever rebelled against the conviction that Mabel would not allow of such a life had he wished it. He had no thrill when he drew near to her house, no yearning for her when, a rare visit concluded, he found himself back upon the road again.

There were other times when he thought he had followed some behest from without. And as the months passed, and when in the quiet of his own corner of the caravan he had had time to speculate, this conviction grew. He had had a direction. God had given it to him. Because this woman had been dear to him, because she had filled in his mind a place that none other had ever filled, he had a duty to her. And now that she was in distress, with her name disgraced and her child likely to starve, it was his part to come to her aid. And so he had obeyed the direction given to him.

And now Mabel had enough, her child was being fed and he no longer bore a name of ill fame, since Mrs. Hathage had found a lawyer who had contrived to change his name to Windmill. Daniel had done what he had felt he must do.

But with every month now the giant knew that what he had done, he had done at a price.

III

It seems that Chicknick himself began to notice. And presently he spoke about it to an assistant manager whom

he imported about this time and to whom eventually he sold the show.

"I don't know what's the matter with him, but if we're not careful he'll give us the slip. . . . He nearly went off before. But of late he's been looking as if he was dead-set on going."

Perhaps it was time. Other people began to be troubled by a suspicion that the giant was dead-set on going. And when people begin to be possessed by an idea of that kind it is not easy to suppress the fact.

At one time the giant had sometimes walked beside the caravan; and when they had passed through country lanes he had even fallen out and wandered into the woods. But for long now he had ceased to do any of these things. Being so dead-set on going, he had no inclination to walk. Once or twice of late he had been found lying faint and speechless in the caravan; and it could certainly be said that he was not costing his employer much in the way of food. "We'll be able to combine giant and skeleton," Hard, the young assistant, had said one day rallyingly. The giant had scarcely smiled in reply. Because, after all, to smile involved an effort. And he thought he could never again make an effort.

Yet one more effort he did make, as there is proof to show.

Perhaps the giant knew, not only that he was dead-set on going, but that he would not have long to wait now before putting that purpose into effect.

The little glass fastened six feet high from the ground outside the caravan, the glass before which he used to shave and to tidy himself for the evening show, would have told him something. For really the giant was now merely a poor elongated bag of bones. The strain of growing had taken its toll at last. To walk a short distance bathed him in perspiration, and the breathing of damp, hot air, night after night, had poisoned him so that the doctor, whom at last Chicknick insisted on calling in, had merely to take a brief glance before shaking his wise and ancient head.

"I can't see what's keeping him going *now*," he said,

and examined the giant again. For he had never seen such a human production before.

"I've been saying," answered Chicknick, "that he was dead-set on going."

They were travelling across England—this time through Derby, Sheffield, Lincoln, and Norwich, and were at last approaching Suffolk again. It became a question whether the giant was in a fit state to be shown. But he assured them that he was; and there is incontestable evidence that the men and women of his county town feasted their eyes once more on their own monstrosity, the freak who reflected such special glory upon their county; and that they enjoyed this privilege both on the Wednesday and Thursday nights of the two-night show. On Friday, Chicknick was to move on to Woodforde. And it was just as all was ready for departure that Daniel could not be found. Fearing what this disappearance might portend, Hard remained behind; but though he made the most diligent inquiries and even telegraphed to young Mrs. Windmill at Stowe, he learnt nothing. He wired to Mabel because he had acquired the notion—by what means who shall say?—that his message would not deeply distress her. And at last Hard followed on to Woodforde in time to write out the notice that "the Management regret that owing to unforeseen circumstances it will not be possible for the public to view Daniel Windmill, the celebrated Suffolk Giant, this evening. The rest of the show will be as advertised, and as it embraces some of the most remarkable exhibits ever visible to the human eye, etc., etc."

There was added, "It is hoped to show Windmill, the famous Giant, to-morrow and subsequent evenings." For by then they certainly would have run him to earth. Or if not they, then somebody else would have done.

And, actually, somebody else did. Oddly enough the person to do so was none other than Catcherpool, who might have been his employer if things had gone but a little differently. Catcherpool, making a short cut from Oldborne through the wood, saw something a little distance away from the path, and pushing his way among the under-

growth had found the giant lying at full length, his head pillowed on a moss-covered stone and his eyes staring up into the sky.

"He wore jest a bag o' bones. . . . How the bor got where he did fare to be more'n I can think—more'n any can think. But they say that at the last if there be suffen you want, somewhere where you'd be, you have the strength given. Anyhow there he wore, laying straight out. It must have strained him like to get there, and yet what struck me wore the face of him—like a child's all contented and happy-like, as if he'd got to somewhere he'd wanted to get to. I never seen a man that die happier. Well, poor soul, he had need of happiness, for there woren't none to give it him here."

"I wonder," it was the parson, Framlingham, who put the question, "I wonder if he was troubled at the last about his length of limb?"

"I don't think that, sir"; the man looked a little moved, hesitated, and then added in a funny, low tone, "I have a look round him and I see his little Bible was by his side with a verse marked out in t' margin and one word underlined: 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me.' And the word he have underlined wore 'little.' As if he think that wore he!"

They buried him in Oldborne. And when, some months later, there was talk of a stone, Framlingham said quietly that, given the right to compose the inscription, he would pay. Mabel, nothing loath, consented.

Now Framlingham seems to have been a man of understanding. He certainly understood Mabel. And it is possible that he understood the true inwardness of the giant's sudden change of purpose when, following his delighted acceptance of the offer of work in the old loved scenes, he had said that he proposed to remain with the show.

"His heart was set on coming back to the village, to his fields and birds. And then he just didn't come. It was a hard thing to go back to be made an exhibition of. But he went, and, though he would never know it . . ."

He broke off. And so, without considering too much how they would have pleased Daniel himself, he wrote the words that now stand where whosoever strays beyond the gate in Oldborne churchyard may read, as I have read :

Sacred to the Memory of
DANIEL WINDMILL,
the East Anglian Giant.

He was exhibited in most parts of the
country, but he makes his best exhibition
in the presence of his Blessed Redeemer.

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BY JOHN OWEN

THE SARDONIC SMILE

A Novel Based on the Romantic Life of Heinrich Heine

By Ludwig Diehl

'The Spirit of the world
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Their vaunts, their feats—let a
sardonic smile
For one short moment wander o'er
his lips.
That smile was Heine!'
— *Matthew Arnold.*

FROM a chill city on the Rhine to a garret window in Paris — down to the cities and hillsides of olive-silvered Italy — back to the sorrows of a 'mattress grave' beside the Seine — such was the pilgrimage of the modern Ahasuerus — Heinrich Heine, the Wandering Jew.

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